NEW

100 PLAYSTATION GAMES TO PLAY BEFORE YOU DIE

FROM THE MAKERS OF retro GAMER

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Digital Edition

FUTURE

THIRD EDITION

ICONIC CHARACTERS △○□✕ EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS △○□✕ BEHIND THE SCENES

100 PLAYSTATION GAMES TO PLAY BEFORE YOU DIE

Sony's PlayStation revolutionised the videogame industry. It wasn't the first home console, but it brought gaming to the masses in a way few other systems at the time managed to do.

Now, more than 25 years after its initial release there are over 10,000 games spanning Sony's home and handheld consoles, and PlayStation leads the way in console exclusives. With so many experiences and genres to choose from, it can be daunting. But fear not! We've compiled 100 unmissable titles that no PlayStation fan's library should be without.

Some titles will challenge you and test your wits, others provide simple escapism. Some will make you laugh, others may make you cry – but each experience will be unforgettable.

Inside you'll also find behind-the-scenes features from the archives of **Retro Gamer**, **EDGE** and **GamesRadar**, giving you insider info on the creation of some of PlayStation's finest games, most enduring franchises and iconic characters.

So, checklists at the ready, dive in to our top 100. Then fire up your consoles and get playing!

FUTURE

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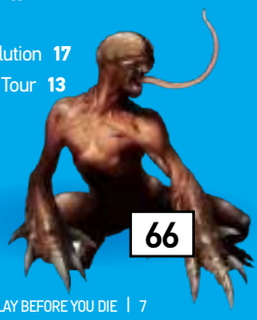


100 PLAYSTATION GAMES TO PLAY BEFORE YOU DIE

There are well over 10,000 games on Sony's consoles, so it's easy to be overwhelmed by choice. Join us as we highlight 100 of the very best

It's no exaggeration to say that when Sony entered the console market in 1994, the world of videogames was changed forever. The fact that the original PlayStation bore such a brand name gave it a different public perception – where Sega and Nintendo were akin to toy companies, Sony was respected as a manufacturer of high-quality TVs and stereo systems. With aggressive marketing and a focus on expanding the gaming audience to include more adult players, Sony leapfrogged the existing gaming giants had the first ever console to sell over 100 million units. The launch of the PlayStation 2 in 2000 was no less historic, as the system's market head start and DVD capability ultimately made it the best selling console of all time, with over 155 million systems sold.

That dominance couldn't last forever, as Sony challenged Nintendo's position as the king of the handheld market in 2004. The PlayStation Portable didn't succeed in that goal but with over 76.4 million consoles sold, it was no failure. The PlayStation 3 was significantly less popular than the PS2 thanks its high price at launch in 2006, as well as strong competition from Microsoft's Xbox 360 and the Nintendo Wii, but Sony still sold 87.4 million of them. 2011's underappreciated PlayStation Vita is the only of Sony's systems to truly underperform, but the company swiftly moved past that with the PlayStation 4 – over 100 million of them have been shipped since 2013.

Of course, none of that success would have been possible without fantastic games, and we've selected the best from across all of the home and handheld PlayStations – but we haven't chosen to rank them, as they're all worth your time. So get comfortable and start making a checklist, as we present 100 of the best games on Sony's consoles.

Many thanks to Darran Jones, Drew Sleep and Nick Thorpe for compiling and curating this top 100 list.

© Bandai Namco

Tekken 3

■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

Namcо's 3D fighting series has been a premier attraction on every PlayStation platform, but the third game was perhaps its finest hour. Building on the accomplished fighting model of its predecessor, *Tekken 3* added a number of popular characters including Hwoarang, Ling Xiaoyu and Jin Kazama, as well as the button-basher's favourite Eddy Gordo. Character models were given additional detail and showed less obvious joints between limbs, and animation was improved too.

However, what made *Tekken 3* such a joy was the sheer amount of extras.

A wealth of unlockable characters covered everyone from old favourites like Heihachi to the fearsome newcomer Bryan Fury, as well as the bizarre Dr Bosconovich. Tekken Force mode re-imagined the game as a scrolling beat-'em-up, and Tekken Ball mixed up the fighting by adding beach volleyball rules. Few fighters have ever offered so much, and done it so well.

© Square Enix

Kingdom Hearts

■ **Year:** 2002 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

Squaresoft was on top of the world thanks to the popularity of its *Final Fantasy* series during the early days of the PS2's life – so naturally, the best thing to do was take its cast and do a crossover with Disney's beloved characters. Yes, it's an odd mixture, but *Kingdom Hearts* remains a fan favourite many years after its first release. Part of that is doubtless due to its enjoyable action-RPG game design, but much of the appeal has to be the ability to buddy up with Donald Duck and visit the worlds of classic Disney films including Alice In Wonderland, Peter Pan, The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, Hercules and Tarzan.

3 Ridge Racer

■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

© Bandai Namco

Namco's launch game showed that while Sony was an upstart newcomer in the console market, its hardware was the real deal. The year before, *Ridge Racer* had revolutionised graphics in arcade games, but the power of the PlayStation allowed for a shockingly close version to be enjoyed in your living room. It's historically significant, and it's still great fun.

4 SSX Tricky

■ **Year:** 2001 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

© EA

The original *SSX* was a highlight of the PS2 launch, but the sequel blew it away. Everything was more over the top – the characters' brash personalities were highlighted, and they gained insane new 'Uber Tricks' to reward good play. EA also made smart use of the original game, remixing its tracks for a new experience and adding a couple more.

5 Bayonetta

■ **Year:** 2009 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

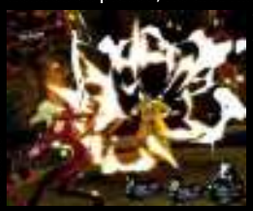
©PlatinumGames

When you need to kill angels, there's only one person to call – the sassy, sexy witch who gives this game its title. *Bayonetta* takes many of its hack-and-slash design cues from *Devil May Cry*, which was also directed by this game's director Hideki Kamiya, but adds brutal 'Torture attacks' and delivers even more epic encounters – particularly in its boss battles.

6 Persona 5

Year: 2016 **Platform:** PlayStation 4

When a high school student discovers an app that allows him to explore people's subconscious desires as places, he and his friends resolve to use this power to change the hearts of villains. The latest entry in the series by Atlus offers many hours of top-class gameplay, and is one of the most stylish games in the genre.



©P-Studio

7 Titanfall 2

Year: 2016 **Platform:** PlayStation 4

What Respawn's first-person shooter lacks in terms of a compelling story, it more than makes up for with exciting gameplay. Its titular Titans are a range of gigantic mech suits that drastically change the nature of battle, no matter whether you're piloting or fighting them, and their inclusion provides a unique experience in the genre.

©Respawn Entertainment

8 God Of War: Chains Of Olympus

Year: 2008 **Platform:** PlayStation Portable

Kratos' handheld debut is a prequel to the original *God Of War*, and it's just as good as the home console games. Ready At Dawn intelligently adapted the series' established controls to the PSP, ensuring that the game's bloody brawls are still satisfying. If you've ever wondered how far the hardware could be pushed, this graphically incredible game is essential.

©Ready At Dawn

© SCE Japan Studio

LocoRoco

Year: 2006 **Platform:** PSP

In this platform game, your job is to help the *LocoRoco* to rescue each other and beat the evil Moja – but instead of taking control of the cute blob creatures yourself, you control the world around them by using the L and R buttons to tilt the stage. Along the way they'll join together and split at your command, and they can be transformed into all sorts of funny shapes, which might help or hinder them in moving around and solving puzzles. It's an inventive and infectiously happy game, and thanks to its flat coloured cartoon graphics and diverse soundtrack it's one of Sony's most recognisable handheld games too.

Red Dead Redemption

Year: 2010 **Platform:** PlayStation 3

It's astonishing that there are so few brilliant videogame Westerns, but thankfully Rockstar's effort here is so good that you're unlikely to need many others. In gameplay terms, the design template of the *Grand Theft Auto* games is applied to the old west, with a vast open world to explore and plenty of things to do, and a protagonist whose reputation hinges on his actions. However, the real draw is the tale of John Marston's quest to round up his former outlaw compatriots in a bid to protect his family – and once you've finished that, the substantial *Undead Nightmare* DLC campaign sees John battle against a zombie apocalypse.

© Rockstar

11 Twisted Metal World Tour

■ **Year:** 1996 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

Though kids were the main console audience in the Eighties, Hudson Soft's adventure avoids the cartoonish look favoured by many NES games, and presents a sophisticated platform-RPG hybrid.

©SingleTrac

Your character's skills grow as you play, and there are plenty of NPCs to speak to, but exploration and combat are handled in typical platform game fashion.

12 Flipnic

■ **Year:** 2003 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

This bizarre cult classic is one of the few times game developers have ever explored what pinball could be without the constraints of a physical table. Your ball can travel off to brand new interconnected boards, and tables can completely transform, providing a fun challenge. In a surreal touch – typical of director Katsuyuki Kanetaka – UFOs can even turn up and abduct your ball.

© Ubisoft

13 Tokyo Jungle

■ **Year:** 2012 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

This unusual game takes place in a post-apocalyptic Tokyo, where humans have gone extinct and all manner of animals have taken over the formerly thriving city. In story mode, you search for the truth behind the apocalypse, but the game's survival mode is where it's at – you can choose anything from a tiny Pomeranian up to a massive lion and try to stay alive in the harsh, giraffe-eat-bear world.

©Crispy's

Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped

■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

14 **Every console in** the Nineties needed a mascot platform game, and Crash was the unofficial star on the PlayStation, with three excellent adventures to his name. The third game, in which Crash pursues the villainous Dr Neo Cortex through time, is the best of the bunch. Rather than trying to reinvent the wheel, the game prioritises the standard platforming that players of the previous games are accustomed to – both 2D and into-the-screen 3D styles – but then it adds heaps of extra stuff to do. The game offers motorbike rides, jetski sections, time trials and more, all featuring the tricky challenges and slapstick humour that fans of the bonkers

© Naughty Dog

Overwatch

■ **Year:** 2016 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

15 **Blizzard's first-person** shooter doesn't have a single-player campaign, but it has become a permanent fixture in the PS4's online community, and it's easy to see why. The game fuses MOBA-style character classes and team dynamics to the genre, so the various characters each excel in different roles – damage, tank or support – allowing you to choose how you can best contribute to your team's pursuit of its objective. The cast of *Overwatch* offers genuine variety and has become beloved amongst players thanks to its strong personalities, including superstar gamer and mech pilot D.Va, chirpy British time-twister Tracer, the wild west-style bounty hunter McCree and the genius gorilla

©Blizzard Entertainment

Gravity Rush

■ **Year:** 2012 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Vita

16 **Team Gravity's action** adventure is all too often overlooked, despite being one of the most convincing uses of the Vita's unique features. Playing as Kat, your goal is to restore Hekseville after parts of the city go missing in a gravity storm, and fight the Nevi monsters that spawned from the storm. To do that, you'll need to manipulate gravity – and thanks to the Vita's gyro function, that's as easy as pointing the system in the direction you'd like to fall. Once you do, you can walk up walls and across ceilings, allowing you to explore some of gaming's most innovative stage designs.

© SCE Japan Studio

© Santa Monica Studio

God Of War

■ **Year:** 2005 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

17 **Kratos is a Spartan** warrior in a class of his own – feared not only by his enemies, but by those who find themselves fortunate enough to receive his support. Tormented by his past and his status as a servant to the Olympian gods, this game sees him accept a final order from Athena – he must kill the god of war. That means using the chained Blades Of Chaos to battle Ares' hordes, and empowers the player to visit some truly brutal violence upon enemies as they hack and slash their way through the game.

God Of War was an incredible showcase for the PS2. SCE Santa Monica's understanding of the mature hardware paid off as the developer delivered complex scenery, plenty of enemies and a smooth frame rate. What's more, the game featured incredible set pieces during its many epic boss battles, often incorporating QTE sequences to let the player gawp.

18 Ultra Street Fighter IV

■ **Year:** 2014 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

© Capcom

The return of Capcom's legendary series revitalised the fighting game scene in 2009, and after five years this ultimate version arrived. The battle system is finely tuned and features 44 fighters including veterans Ryu and Akuma, plus newcomers like Abel and Juri, so you won't master it in a hurry.

19 Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom

■ **Year:** 2018 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

©Game Atelier

This 2D Metroidvania is a sequel to the old Wonder Boy games, packed with clever design and beautiful art. Everyone in the kingdom has been transformed into animals, and it's Jin's job to turn them back. He starts out as a pig, but soon gains new animal forms with unique abilities.

20 Virtua Tennis World Tour

■ **Year:** 2005 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Portable

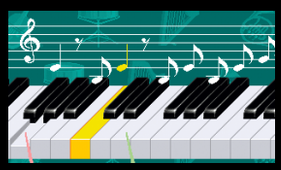
© Sumo Digital

Sega's game is a perfect fit for the handheld platform, as you can fit a game in whenever you have a few spare minutes. This is especially true thanks to the brilliant World Tour mode, which allows you to train your player between tournaments by participating in a series of quick mini-games.

©Konami

21 Bishi Bashi Special

■ **Year:** 2000 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation



If you're a frequent host of multiplayer sessions, you need this hilarious button-bashing game in your collection. *Bishi Bashi Special* contains 85 different mini-games, which range from kicking mobsters to chucking custard pies at your wedding guests. While only three controllers are supported at once during games, eight players can take part in party mode so everybody can get involved.

22 Max Payne

■ **Year:** 2001 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

©Remedy Entertainment

Remedy's neo-noir third-person shooter follows the tale of Max Payne, a former cop trying to solve the murder of his wife and child. Slow-motion gunplay was all the rage following *The Matrix*, and *Max Payne*'s signature gameplay trick is allowing players to activate bullet time. While it felt a little like fad-chasing then, the feature still distinguishes the game today.

23 Catherine

■ **Year:** 2011 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

Vincent's a guy with problems. His girlfriend is talking about marriage and he's unsure, and he's also just had a one night stand with a gorgeous blonde! While he spends nights at the bar agonising over which woman to choose, his nightmares also see him climbing perilous towers of blocks. This tricky puzzle game is a cult favourite, particularly with competitive players.

©Atlus

©Insomniac

Marvel's Spider-Man

■ **Year:** 2018 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

24 **The idea of Spider-Man** swinging through an open world and thwarting crime isn't new, as many have fond memories of Treyarch's *Spider-Man 2* on PS2, but Insomniac brought the idea right up to date. While it's fun to swing around the game's beautiful rendition of Manhattan, its great success is in making the combat fun. Spidey is an agile fighter who can make excellent use of the environment and various gadgets, taking full advantage of his web-slinging powers. Top that off with an original story created exclusively for the game, and you have a title that no comic book fan should miss.

Grand Theft Auto V

■ **Year:** 2013 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

25 **Few games have ever** had the ambition of Rockstar's magnum opus, as the open world crime simulator was one of the most costly developments in gaming history. While the game offers the series' usual freeform approach to progression and the now expected carjacking and gunplay, it's not hard to see where the money went – *Grand Theft Auto V* pushed the ageing PS3 to its limits, offering players a vast, detailed open world to explore, while improving the mechanical aspects of the game such as driving and combat.

The game allows you to switch between three very different characters – Franklin, Michael and Trevor – whose paths cross as they search for a way to make money in a world still reeling from a financial crash. But single-player isn't all the game has to offer, as players can get together to cause chaos in the excellent GTA Online mode – a first for the series

© Rockstar

26 Sonic Mania

■ **Year:** 2017 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

Sonic returns to his Mega Drive roots in this 2D platformer, developed by fans of the series. As usual he's chasing Doctor Eggman, and this adventure takes in remixed stages from his past as well as brand new levels like Press Garden Zone and Studiopolis Zone, all of which include fan-friendly nods to the past and exciting new design gimmicks.

©PagodaWest Games, Headcannon, Sega

27 Tekken: Dark Resurrection

■ **Year:** 2006 ■ **Platform:** PSP

A straight PSP conversion of *Tekken 5* would have been impressive, and the graphical achievement on the handheld hardware was great. But Namco went further, bringing over content from the arcade update including two new characters. It also added the Tekken Dojo mode, a compelling quest that adds considerable value.

©Namco

28 OlliOlli

■ **Year:** 2014 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Vita

©Roll7

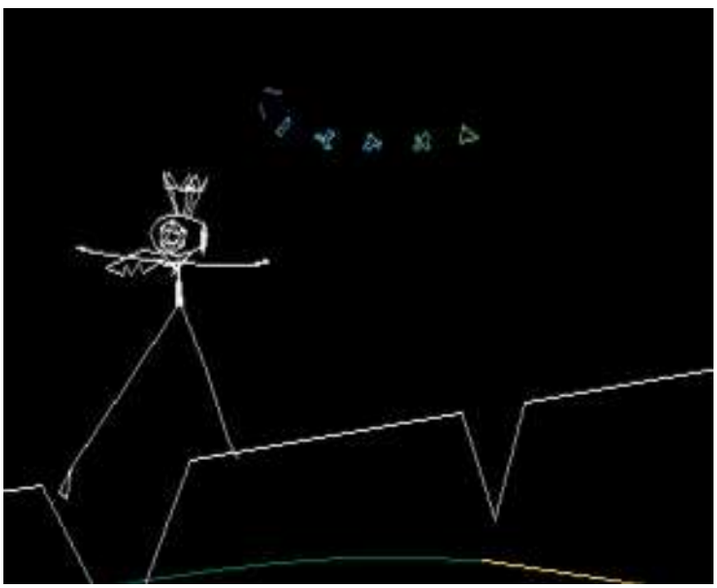
Roll7's 2D take on the extreme sports genre was a surprise gem. Controls are stripped back to a minimum, with all tricks pulled off using the analogue stick alone, so you're left to focus on perfectly executing combos. That's definitely necessary, as the game features some incredibly fiendish stage goals that'll have you screaming, before immediately hitting restart.

Burnout 3: Takedown

■ **Year:** 2004 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

29 **The first two** *Burnout* games went out of their way to make crashes look spectacular, but you ideally never wanted to see them – so the genius of Criterion's third entry in the series was the addition of combat to the arcade racing formula. *Burnout 3* rewards you for driving dangerously, giving you boost fuel for near-misses and driving into traffic, but you extend your boost bar and gain a full refill by taking down your rivals. You can do that by ramming them into walls, running them into traffic and generally causing them to crash, which is endlessly satisfying. Fantastic graphics and a strong licensed soundtrack complete a strong package.

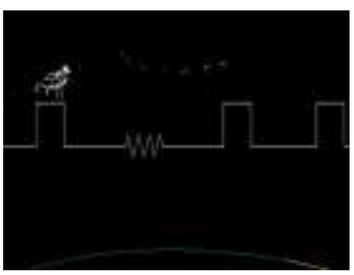
©Criterion Games



Vib-Ribbon

■ **Year:** 1999 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

30 **Masaya Matsuura shot** to fame with the graphically unconventional music game *PaRappa The Rapper*, but *Vib-Ribbon* took that approach to the extreme. *Vib-Ribbon* employs incredibly minimal black and white wireframe graphics, and puts you in control of Vibri, who runs along a white line. Obstacles appear on the line based on the background music, and by pressing buttons with the correct timing you can get Vibri to jump or roll through them. The genius of *Vib-Ribbon* is that it's infinite, as you can play every song with the game – simply pop in any CD you like and marvel as the game automatically generates a level to go with it.



© NanaOn-Sha

31 Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed

■ **Year:** 2012 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

© Sega

Sega's speedy mascot trades in his trainers for a set of wheels, but with a twist – it can transform into a plane or a boat. The tracks, based on Sega games like *Golden Axe* and *Jet Set Radio*, can change dramatically between laps, forcing you to transform as roads are blown up or flooded. It's one of the best kart racers ever.

32 Tetris Effect

■ **Year:** 2018 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

© Monstars, Resonair

The enduring block puzzle game might seem like an odd use for the power of the PS4, but Tetsuya Mizuguchi has created a masterful version. As you progress through the game, new audiovisual themes accompany the action – sounds play based on your moves, and the game speed matches the music. It's a truly beautiful experience when using PlayStation VR too.

33 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories

■ **Year:** 2006 ■ **Platform:** PSP

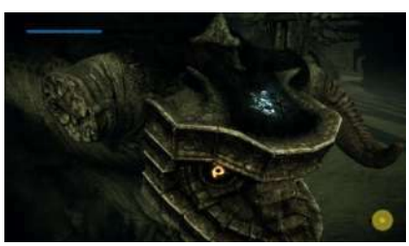
© Rockstar

Cramming a true open world experience into Sony's portable machine was hugely impressive in *Liberty City Stories*, but Rockstar's second attempt was even better. Apart from all the improvements to the game engine, particularly the combat, we really love the way you can build up your crime empire. Plus, we're always suckers for a game set in the Eighties.

Shadow Of The Colossus

■ **Year:** 2018 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

34 **Wander's got a problem** – the maiden Mono is dead, and he'd rather she not be. As a result he strikes a bargain with the mysterious Dormin, who promises her revival if Wander and his horse, Agro, can kill the 16 colossi inhabiting this world. Each colossus poses a serious challenge and fighting them is exhilarating, but bringing down these majestic beasts is always tinged with melancholy, as you return to the silence of Wander's desolate world. You might be surprised that we've chosen not to highlight Team Ico's PS2 original, but as great as the 2005 version was, it suffered from slight control awkwardness and some noticeable performance problems. Bluepoint Games' remake remedies those problems, while giving the game a significant graphical makeover that manages to remain faithful to the original artistic vision. It's an impressive piece of work, befitting the ultimate boss rush and one of the best games ever.



© Bluepoint Games

Resident Evil 2

■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

35 **The best of** the original fixed-camera *Resident Evil* trilogy is still an impressive game, over 20 years later. By moving the action from Spencer Mansion to Raccoon City, Capcom raised the stakes of its survival horror series – more zombies meant more action, and the police station remains an iconic location. The game introduced popular characters like Leon Kennedy, Claire Redfield and Ada Wong, but also gave us memorable enemies like the Licker and the monstrously mutated William Birkin. The two-disc adventure is larger and more varied than the first game, and features an innovative "zapping" system where actions taken as one character affect your next game as the other.

© Capcom

© Rocksteady Studios

Batman: Arkham Asylum

■ **Year:** 2009 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

36 **Back when The** Dark Knight was the superhero film that dominated the public consciousness, Rocksteady took on the daunting challenge of creating a game worthy of Batman and did an amazing job. Tricked by The Joker into entering the titular facility, Batman must fight off the city's criminal population while trying to find out what his arch-nemesis is up to. The game's streamlined combat system allows you to really enjoy the bruising brawls to their fullest, while stealth elements of the game really get you into the mindset of a hero who stalks evil from the shadows.

Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc

■ **Year:** 2013 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Vita

37 **In this murder** mystery visual novel, Makoto Naegi and the other students of Hope's Peak Academy are locked in their school, with a deranged teddy bear as headmaster. The only way to graduate and leave is to kill a classmate – and get away with it. Inevitably people begin to crack and the blood starts flowing, and it's your job to keep yourself alive by proving their guilt, in the hope of eventually escaping the school. As well as a stylish take on a genre not known for graphical excess, *Danganronpa* offers tricky puzzles, a plot that's as funny as it is dark, and an endearing cast of anime characters.

© Spike

38 WipEout 2097

■ **Year:** 1996 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

The second entry in Sony's futuristic racing series gave us more tracks, faster racing and the iconic Piranha team. This sequel has aged far better than the original, thanks to its more forgiving collisions and gentler difficulty curve, as well as better weapons and the ability to destroy rival racers. The licensed soundtrack featuring The Prodigy is still ace too.

© Psygnosis

39 Amplitude

■ **Year:** 2003 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

Before hitting it big with the *Guitar Hero* series, Harmonix gave us the cult hit *Frequency* and this sequel. The goal is to activate various instrument tracks by hitting timed notes, switching between them to keep them active and keep the song going until the end. The excellent soundtrack features big hitters including Garbage, Run-DMC, Slipknot, Blink-182 and David Bowie.

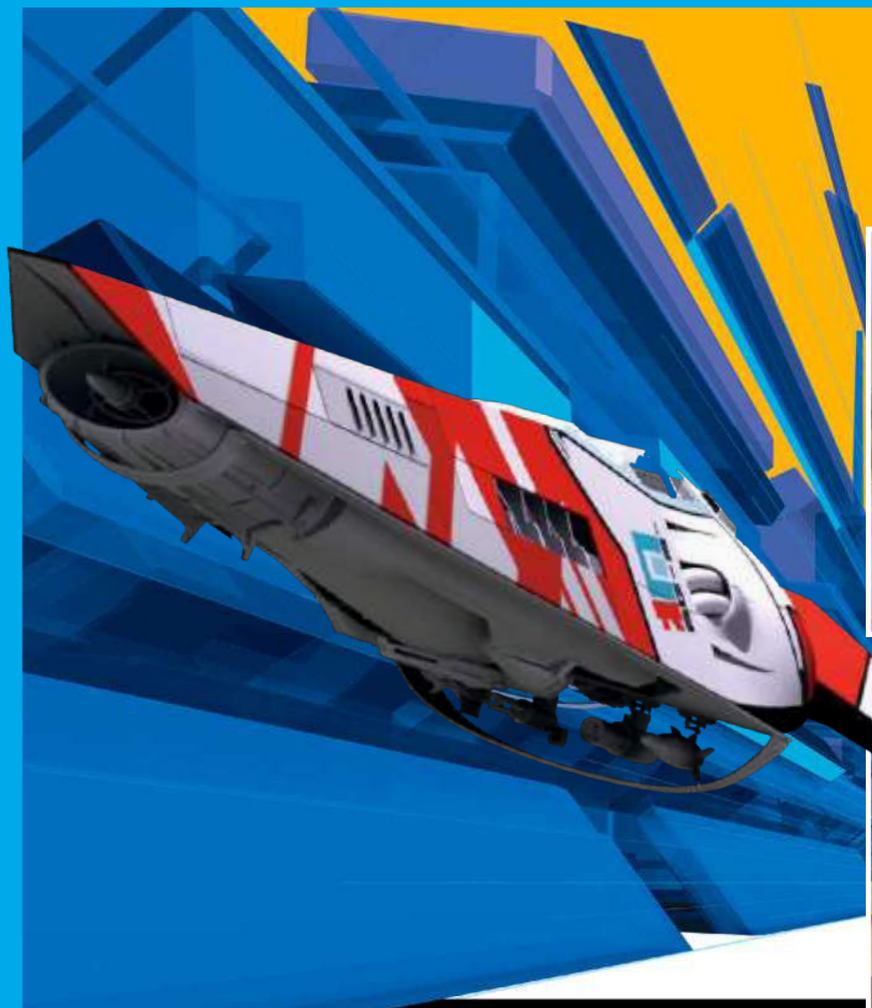
© Harmonix

40 Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution

■ **Year:** 2003 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

The original 3D fighting series hit the PS2 like a roundhouse kick to the head, boasting attractive visuals, genuinely varied characters and fast, fluid combat. The game has a daunting reputation as a technical fighter, but Sega included a truly helpful tutorial, and the Quest mode lets you battle against simulations of Japan's best players as you battle through Tokyo.

© Sega



© SCE Studio Liverpool

WipEout Pure

■ **Year:** 2005 ■ **Platform:** PSP

41 **After the slightly** disappointing *WipEout Fusion* for PS2, this handheld entry revitalised the series. The handling of the anti-gravity racers is closer to the floaty feeling of the PlayStation originals, and the new course designs are top notch. Best of all, the revised shield energy system introduces a brilliant balance between risk and reward. You can sacrifice energy for speed boosts by performing barrel rolls, but regaining it requires you to sacrifice your offensive power-ups. *WipEout Pure* is also graphically detailed and packed with content, including classic tracks and the brilliant Zone Mode which challenges you to keep a permanently accelerating vehicle alive.

That's not all – demonstrate the capabilities of the PSP, you can play multiplayer from a single disc. A massive amount of DLC is also available, adding more teams, music and 16 additional tracks to the 16 on the disc, and all of it was released for free.

42 Yakuza 0

■ **Year:** 2015 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

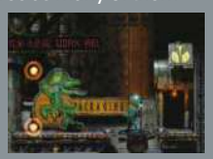
There are plenty of entries in Sega's crime thriller series, but this Eighties-themed prequel is the perfect place to start. Players brawl with thugs as they explore districts of Tokyo and Osaka – each of which are densely packed with distractions including batting cages, shogi and real retro arcade games. The main story is a thrilling, but a wealth of side quests allow the protagonists to shine.

© Sega

43 Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee

■ **Year:** 1997 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

Abe used to be happy with his job at the meat factory, until he discovered that he and his fellow Mudokons were destined to become food! Now the former slave strives to free as many of them as possible – and you experience that as a puzzle platformer, making use of pre-rendered 3D graphics and FMV to create a cinematic atmosphere.

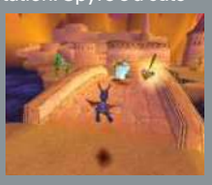


©Oddworld Inhabitants

44 Spyro The Dragon

■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

Sony's original console struggled with open 3D environments, but Insomniac mastered the hardware to create a memorable platform game unlike any other on the PlayStation. Spyro's a cute character, whose ability to glide and breathe fire makes him a great choice of star, and rescuing the elder dragons that have been turned into crystal statues is very satisfying.



© Insomniac Games

45 Katamari Damacy

■ **Year:** 2004 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

The King Of All Cosmos has wrecked the night sky, and it's your job as the prince to make new stars. How do you do that? You roll over objects using both analogue sticks, adding them to an ever-growing ball. Namco's game has an odd sense of humour, but there's no denying the satisfaction you feel as you roll up civilisation.

© Namco

46 Valkyria Chronicles

■ **Year:** 2008 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

© Sega

Initially, Sega's World War II-inspired game strikes you with its beautiful graphics, which appear to be hand-drawn. But the real draw is the innovative hybrid strategy gameplay, in which each character takes turns to act, but actions are taken in realtime – so you still charge into gunfire. Each squad member has personality traits and friendships that matter in battle, too.

47 Rez Infinite

■ **Year:** 2016 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

© United Game Artists

This rail shooter was a classic on the PlayStation 2 in 2001, thanks to its abstract graphics and awesome interactive soundtrack, but Enhance Games' updated version is even better. Area X is a visually stunning addition to the game, and the PlayStation VR support feels natural – aiming with your head feels like the way *Rez* was always meant to be played.

48 Burnout Legends

■ **Year:** 2005 ■ **Platform:** PSP

© Criterion Games

This exclusive handheld version of *Burnout* takes the brilliant combat racing of *Burnout 3: Takedown*, and adds a variety of tracks and modes from both the original *Burnout* and *Burnout 2: Point Of Impact*. The result is a lovely little greatest hits package that provides an attractive and thrilling dose of arcade racing, wherever you happen to be.

Grand Theft Auto III

■ **Year:** 2001 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

49 **The first two** *GTA* games were good fun, but their overhead perspective limited your connection to the mischief you were making. Moving the formula into 3D created a blockbuster hit – the open world was a technical marvel, and offered a compelling playground for wannabe criminals. But besides causing mayhem, there's plenty of reasons to follow Claude's criminal exploits. You can also engage in other activities like vigilantism and cab driving, and even listening to the radio is a pleasure, thanks to Rockstar's satirical take on American advertising and talk radio. *GTA III* was the genesis of modern open world games.

© Rockstar

Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag

■ **Year:** 2013 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

50 **Ubisoft's open world** adventures are always popular, and a few of them were considered as potential entries on this list, but ultimately the fourth major game won out. *Black Flag* includes everything that made the previous games so exciting, from the gradual reveal of the map as you climb towers, to the stylish and brutal ways you can kill your enemies. But what put this particular game at the top of the heap is its setting – the Caribbean locations are a gorgeous change of pace for the series, and the ability to get into naval battles and recruit a pirate crew is a compelling addition to the series' core gameplay.

© Ubisoft

51 Driver

■ **Year:** 1999 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

This action driving game is set entirely behind the wheel of a car as you assume the role of an undercover NYPD officer. The game is infamous for its tutorial level, where you have to pull off a series of seemingly impossible driving moves before you're allowed into the game proper. Get past that, though, and you'll be treated to a real PlayStation classic.

© Ubisoft Reflections

52 LittleBigPlanet

■ **Year:** 2008 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

The potential of this side-on platformer is literally limitless. It's known for its insane level creator which is easy to navigate. Over the years, the game's community has generated an ocean of fantastic stages to jump into. Want to place an adorable Sackboy in a horror setting? Sure! How about a thrill-ride rollercoaster? It's all possible in *LittleBigPlanet*.

© Media Molecule

53 Mass Effect 2

■ **Year:** 2010 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

The RPG masters at BioWare are excellent storytellers, known for creating characters that you wish were your real friends, and *Mass Effect 2* is an example of the studio at its best. The emotional connection you build with your crew members is stellar, and those relationships are put to the test in a climactic suicide mission that'll send your heart-rate into the stratosphere.

© BioWare

Silent Hill 2

■ **Year:** 2001 (PS2), 2012 (PS3) ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3

54 **While we've taken** a few trips to the nightmare-infested town of *Silent Hill* over the years, the second time sticks out as the most horrific. Konami doubles down on the psychological horror for this sequel: we step into the shoes of James Sunderland as he returns to the infamous locale after he's lured there by a note from his deceased wife. What makes this intriguing, however, is that you're constantly guessing if Sunderland is a reliable narrator or not – after all, the monsters he encounters are a reflection of his psyche and if they're *that* terrifying, what does that say about him? Piecing together the story of this macabre masterpiece is an absolute must for any horror fan.

© Konami

BioShock

■ **Year:** 2008 (PS3), 2016 (PS4) ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4

55 **You can't get** a more iconic videogame setting than the sprawling underwater metropolis of Rapture. From your initial awe-inspiring descent to the city in a bathysphere, to navigating its waterlogged walkways, every element about this Art Deco city is magnificent. And the game it plays host to isn't half bad, either. Heavily inspired by the works of Ayn Rand and George Orwell, *BioShock*'s story and themes will stay with you long after the credits roll. As will its excellent game design, mixing light RPG mechanics with first-person shooting and atmospheric navigation, this magnum opus from revered game developer Ken Levine will go down in history as one of the all-time gaming greats.

© 2K Boston

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Final Fantasy VII

■ **Year:** 1997 (PS), 2015 (PS4) ■ **Platform:** PlayStation, PlayStation 4

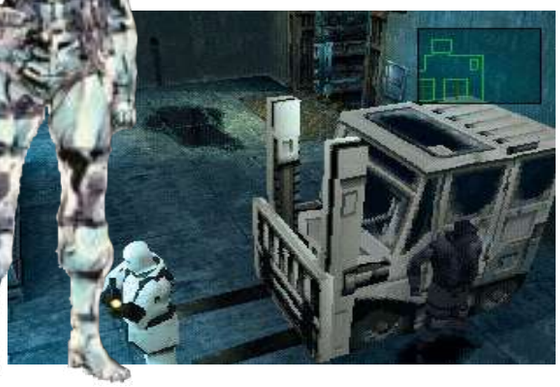
56 **This classic should** need no introduction, such is its impact that it is still heralded as *the* high point for both the *Final Fantasy* series and Japanese role-playing games. Even two decades after its debut it's still as assured and thrilling as it was when it first found its way into PlayStation consoles. *FFVII* is a perfect storm of game design: its Materia-based ability system is magnificent, its soundtrack is sublime and its eco-centric plot feels more relevant now than ever. Plus the roster of heroes you'll spend upwards of 50 hours with are distinct, and stand out as some of the series' best characters.

Final Fantasy VII was also instrumental in the PlayStation's early success. Without it, Sony might not have wooed Japanese audiences as effectively as it did. This RPG classic captured the imagination of millions of gamers worldwide, and it still does to this day.

Metal Gear Solid

■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

57 **There's no better** example of a game that harnessed the power of the PlayStation than *Metal Gear Solid*. At the time of release, everything about it was a landmark achievement: the graphics, the high-stakes gameplay, its cinematic story, full voice acting and an emotional soundtrack. It's a testament to Hideo Kojima's masterpiece, then, that every one of those facets still hold up as well as they did 20 years ago today. The snowy island setting of Shadow Moses is a location of legend in today's gaming landscape, and the game's blend of anime-style action and Hollywood thriller script makes *Metal Gear Solid* an argument-ending counterpoint to those who say games can't tell compelling stories.



© Konami

58 Portal 2

■ **Year:** 2011 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

© Valve Corporation

The first *Portal* made you feel like a rat in a maze, but what if that maze broke and you had to escape the entire laboratory? Well, then you pretty much have *Portal 2*. The challenge is pitched perfectly – enough to have you scratching your head, but not too hard that you want to throw the controller out of the window.

59 Bloodborne

■ **Year:** 2015 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

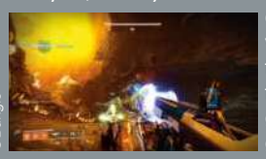
FromSoftware made a name for itself with its Souls games, and *Bloodborne* is where the creator hit its zenith. You get what you put into this Lovecraftian RPG: the intense difficulty will seems insurmountable, but once you start to learn the game's intricacies nothing else will be good enough for you. You won't be forgetting this game in a hurry.

©FromSoftware

60 Destiny 2

■ **Year:** 2017 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

Clues of this ambitious massively multiplayer first-person shooter RPG were found as early as 2009, and Bungie had a lot to hype to live up to. Fortunately, despite an initial stumble during its first year, *Destiny* delivered and is one of the most epic experiences you can have with friends. It's now free to play, so go ahead and give it a shot.



©Bungie

61 Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

■ **Year:** 2004 (PS2), 2011 (PS 3), 2012 (PS Vita) ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Vita

©Konami

Taking the action to Cold War 1964, this epic prequel has you stepping into the shoes of the legendary Big Boss on the mission where he earns his title. Successfully replicating cinematic spy thrillers, and throwing a dash of bombast to help the action feel fresh, this game represents director Hideo Kojima at his best.

62 Final Fantasy XII

■ **Year:** 2006 (PS2) 2018 (PS 4) ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2, PlayStation 4

No game has ever felt quite ahead of its time like *Final Fantasy XII*. On release, its design felt like it echoed MMO RPGs, however when reassessing it today Square's role-playing sequel fits perfectly in this modern gaming landscape of wide open worlds. Its combat system, where you can effectively program your party's AI, is the cherry on top.

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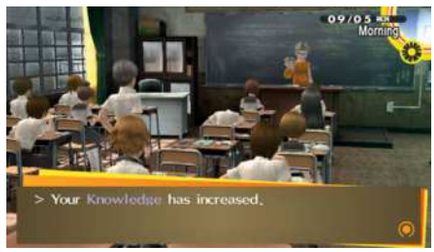
63 Syphon Filter

■ **Year:** 1999 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

© SCE Bend Studio

This more action-focused rival to *Metal Gear Solid* is an epic spy thriller. Its gritty shootouts, stealthy interludes and globetrotting story felt like a *Mission Impossible* movie come to life at the time, and today it still has that charm. It also has one of gaming's most unintentionally hilarious weapons in its Taser – for that alone it's worth a try.



© Atlus

Persona 4: Golden

■ **Year:** 2011 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Vita

64 **The *Persona* series** is a special brand of Japanese RPG. It deftly blends the social simulation aspects of a visual novel with the dungeons and battling of a role-playing game – if that sounds like a strange mix, it is, but it works *so* well. For many, *Persona 4* is the best the series has to offer, and the Golden edition for PS Vita is the definitive version. The way the game's structured into days of the week makes it perfect for on-the-go bursts of play, while the extra content rounds off the story a lot better than the original. This is one of the most stylish games out there, too, and has a killer soundtrack to boot.

God Of War

■ **Year:** 2018 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

65 **Everyone loves a** good redemption story, right? And, boy, SIE Santa Monica cooks up one for the ages with this soft reboot. We rejoin the Spartan god Kratos some time after he's slaughtered the Greek Pantheon in *God Of War 3*; he's fled to the Norse realms and now has a sickly son, Atreus, to look after. The rage-filled antihero is older and a lot more subdued in this sequel, seemingly repentant of his hyper-violent ways, and the game design and story reflect that. Combat is slower, more considered but still satisfying, while the story is a mature tale about coming to terms with loss, which is underpinned by a theme of parenthood.

God Of War released to critical acclaim, and rightly so. Every step of Kratos and Atreus' journey is memorable, each blow to your enemies feels earned and the electrifying climax opens up even more tantalising potential for the series going forward.

© SIE Santa Monica Studio

66 Resident Evil 4

■ **Year:** 2005 (PS2), 2011 (PS3), 2016 (PS4)
■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4

© Capcom

The *Resident Evil* series is known for successfully mutating over the course of its life, and this marks the first time the franchise took a new direction. Switching focus from horror to over-the-shoulder action for *Resident Evil 4* was drastic at the time, but it was the right decision. This macabre masterpiece is one of the best games of all time.

67 Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII

■ **Year:** 2007 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Portable

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While the wider *Final Fantasy VII* canon is generally awful, this prequel to the PlayStation classic is absolutely worth your time. Its action RPG combat is as deep, satisfying yet accessible, and the plot is pretty faithful to the original, not to mention that it has a gut-punch ending that will leave you with waterlogged eyes.

68 Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker

■ **Year:** 2010 (PS Portable) 2011 (PS3)
■ **Platform:** 2010 (PS Portable) 2011 (PS3)

Peace Walker is an outlier in the *Metal Gear Solid* series. It was designed for the PSP, for one, so it adopts a mission-based format and the cutscenes are stylised like a graphic novel, but it works so well. The adaptations for mobile hardware are what make it so memorable.

© Konami

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

■ **Year:** 2015 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

69 **While the first** two *Witcher* games were decent, this threequel pretty much puts *all* modern RPGs to shame. It has all you'd want from a fantasy adventure: an epic story, an absurdly well-characterised protagonist, side-quests that can have multiple outcomes, romance, Charles Dance… we could go on, but we'd be here forever. Despite that big 'three' in the title, you don't have to worry about playing the first two games; this is a self-contained story which brings you up to speed with the *Witcher* world in no time. If you need any more convincing, Henry Cavill, who plays hero Geralt himself in Netflix's *The Witcher* series, is a big fan of this masterpiece videogame.

© CD Projekt

Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

■ **Year:** 2008 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Portable

70 **Despite 2018's *Monster* *Hunter: World*** putting Capcom's creature-slaying series on many gamers' radars, this franchise has been doing big business in Japan for a long time, and that's thanks to *Freedom Unite*. What makes this game so compelling is that it's perfectly designed for commuters, as each hunt will last the time of a typical train journey, and that's why if you happened to be in Japan in 2008, you'd see scores of suited individuals staring at their PSPs, helping one another take down huge dinosaurs or terrifying dragons with an array of stylish weapons. *Freedom Unite* still holds up today, so go on, try taking down a Rathalos on the tube.

© Capcom

71 Horizon Zero Dawn

■ **Year:** 2017 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

It's hard not to be impressed by this release from Guerrilla Games. Its open world is vast, varied and a joy to explore, Aloy makes for a strong lead and there's a surprisingly impressive story at the game's core. The world is filled with dangerous machines, but fortunately Aloy is more than equipped to take them down thanks to a variety of ingenious traps and weapons.

©Guerrilla Games, Sony

72 Vagrant Story

■ **Year:** 2000 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

Square's output on the PlayStation was amazingly prolific and it was always trying new things. One of its best successes from the period is this inventive take on the action RPG genre. It shies away from traditional NPC interaction and instead focuses on puzzle solving and light platform elements. It's all held together by a strategic and very flexible rhythm-like combat engine.

©Square Enix

73 Black

■ **Year:** 2006 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

Criterion Games took a break from making arcade racers to deliver this explosive first-person shooter. Even today the damage caused to its destructible environments is impressive, while its weapons are extremely satisfying to use. There are scalable objectives as you choose different difficulty levels and the intense assaults of each stage give the game an engaging arcade-like thrill.

©Criterion Games

©SIE Japan Studio

Astrobot: Robot Rescue

■ **Year:** 2018 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

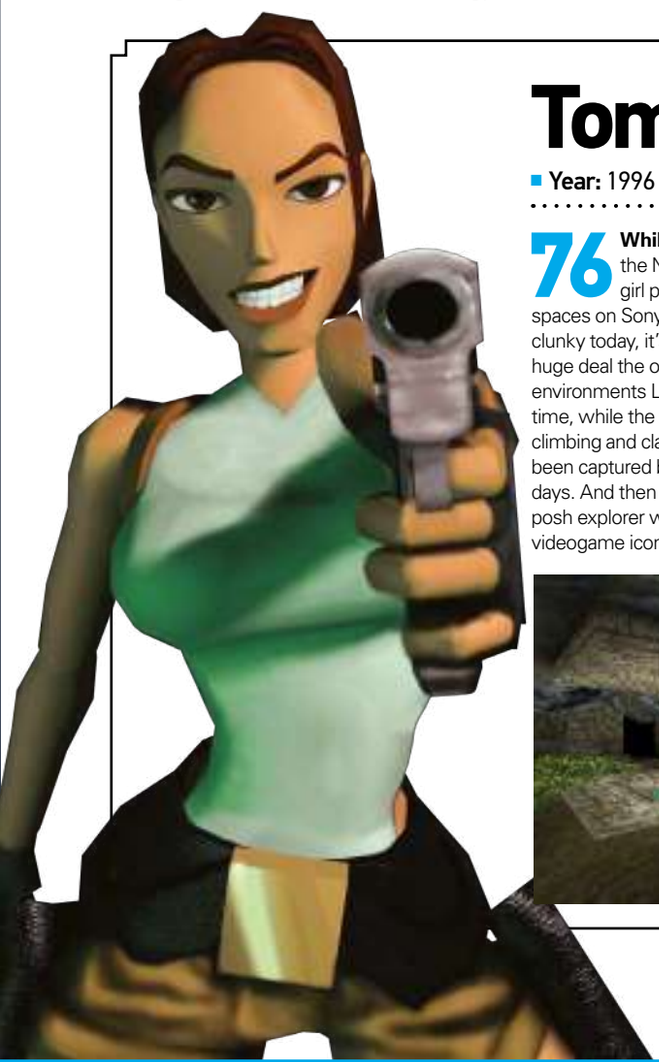
74 **If ever you** needed further proof of the brilliance of VR then look no further than this immensely charming platformer. *Astrobot* has all the conventions of a typical 3D platformer but its magnificent use of virtual reality takes it to a whole new level. Level design throughout is inventive and clever and while you're be traversing worlds you've explored in platform games for years, the sense of scale and height that *Astrobot* affords makes it all feel incredibly new. Many of the robots you need to find on each stage are craftily hidden within the environment, often causing you to constantly survey your virtual surroundings, while stages like the underwater level Beachside Boogie will leave you in no doubt of VR's immersiveness.

Metal Gear Acid 2

■ **Year:** 2005 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Portable

75 **The original *Metal* *Gear Acid*** was a rather clunker card-based strategy game with a batshit crazy storyline. Criticisms were taken onboard and when *Acid*'s sequel arrived it improved every aspect of the original game (from trashing unneeded cards for points to buying new ones) making it a far sleeker, satisfying experience. You're still effectively playing a *Metal Gear* game, so sneaking past enemies and using a variety of weapons to take them down is still part and parcel of the game mechanics, but your actions are now fundamentally controlled by the cards you have in your hand, meaning there's a brand-new level of strategy to consider.

©Konami



Tomb Raider

■ **Year:** 1996 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

76 **While Mario was** making 3D waves on the Nintendo 64, Lara Croft was defining girl power and the joy of exploring 3D spaces on Sony's PlayStation. Although it feels a little clunky today, it's important to highlight just what a huge deal the original *Tomb Raider* actually was. The environments Lara could explore felt gigantic at the time, while the sheer sense of scale you felt from climbing and clambering through tombs really hasn't been captured by the series since its early PlayStation days. And then of course there's Lara, an impossibly posh explorer who has become one of the few videogame icons to break outside the industry.

©Core Design, Eidos Interactive

77 OutRun 2006 Coast 2 Coast

■ **Year:** 2006 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

Sumo Digital's racer remains the best *OutRun* experience you can have. It not only contains all the levels from the arcade hits *OutRun 2* and *OutRun 2 SP*, but adds a raft of additional extras from new cars, a wealth of unlockable extras and the gargantuan Coast 2 Coast mode, which offers all manner of entertaining minigames to try out.

©Sumo Digital

78 Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

■ **Year:** 2007 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

Infinity Ward's *Call Of Duty* was something of a departure for the series, modernising the franchise and adding a whole host of improved features to its multiplayer. The single-player campaign remains a highlight (All Ghillied Up is as intense today as it was in 2007) and it's easy to see why it received a PS4 remaster in 2016.

©Infinity Ward

79 Space Invaders Extreme

■ **Year:** 2008 ■ **Platform:** PSP

Taito's reimagining of its venerable arcade hit proved a fantastic decision. While it fundamentally follows the rules of the original 1978 classic, it's brought bang up to date, with fast-paced action, varied formations and some great power-ups (earned by shooting four invaders of the same colour). The end result is a frantic, impeccable shooter that's perfect for playing on the go.

©Taito, Gulti co., ltd

80 The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

■ **Year:** 2011 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

Granted it's since been remastered on PS4 and in VR no less, but there's still something incredibly ambitious about the PS3 original. It remains one of Bethesda's most ambitious open worlds to explore, while the combat and magic has been greatly enhanced over past games. What's more, you've got those dramatic dragon encounters, which remain a highlight of the franchise.

©Bethesda Game Studios

81 Rocket League

■ **Year:** 2015 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

This bizarre cross between a racing game and *Speedball* has taken the eSports world by storm. All you do is drive a ball with your car into an opponent's goal while they try to do the same to you – like a game of football where the players are cars. It may sound simple, and it is, but it's also deceptively deep, with skilled players being able to pull off all sorts of crazy and impressive tricks.

©Psyonix

82 Gran Turismo

■ **Year:** 1997 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

There was nothing quite like *Gran Turismo* when it hit Sony's console. Sure it wasn't the first simulator to appear on the system, but none could match its photorealistic looking replays, insane number of licensed cars and its exhaustive list of tweakable options and game modes, including an immensely deep Simulation Mode. Little wonder it took five years to make, and spawned a best-selling franchise.

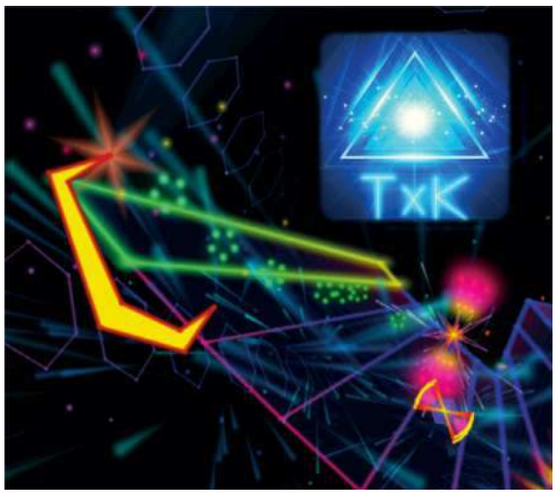
©Polys Entertainment

83 Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition

■ **Year:** 2006 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

After a disappointing sequel, *Devil May Cry 3* proved that demon hunter Dante was still a force to be reckoned with. The combat engine is exceptionally deep, allowing Dante access to four distinct fighting styles that cater to all sorts of players. We've opted for the special edition as it adds Vergil as a playable character and offers a wealth of neat extras.

©Capcom



TxK

■ **Year:** 2014 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation Vita

84 **Jeff Minter has** been making videogames since the Eighties, specialising in arcade-styled blasters, from *Gridrunner* to the excellent *Tempest 2000*. *TxK* is *Tempest* in all but name and is a stunning psychedelic shooter that's filled with plenty of references to Minter's work, from its trippy sounds to its bizarre visual imagery. As with similar tube shooters the aim is to race around the edges of each stage, shooting and avoiding incoming enemies and collecting as many power-ups as possible, before moving on to the next challenging level. It's the very definition of twitch gaming on Sony's portable console and its eye-melting visuals look incredible on the Vita's OLED screen.

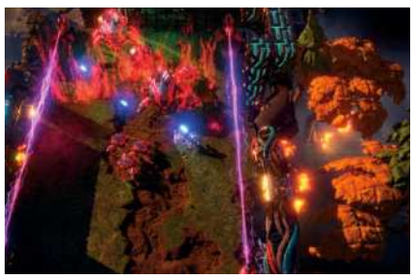
©Llamasoft

Resident Evil VII

■ **Year:** 2017 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

85 **Capcom went back** to basics for its seventh core *Resident Evil* game and it paid off in spades. Exploring the derelict home of the Bakers recalls the mansion from the original game, while there's a firm focus on exploration and story compared to the action of later instalments in the series. Best of all is the new first-person viewpoint which not only shows off the impressive new engine Capcom designed for the game, but also ensures encounters with enemies are always absolutely terrifying. Last, but by no means least, is a truly exceptional VR mode, which turns on already nerve-wracking game into one PSVR's most unforgettable experiences.

©Capcom



Nex Machina

■ **Year:** 2017 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 4

86 **Housemarque caused** great excitement in retro communities when it announced it would be teaming up with Eugene Jarvis to make a new twin stick-shooter. The designer of *Robotron: 2084* and *Smash TV* worked as a creative consultant on *Nex Machina* and you can see his input on every stage. Essentially this is *Robotron* for a new generation, just as *Resogun* was effectively a remake of *Defender* (also by Jarvis). You race around the well-constructed levels looking for humans to rescue while fending off hordes of enemies. Like *TxK* it's an incredible shooter combining the impressive voxel engine of Housemarque with the responsive controls found in Jarvis' old games.

©Housemarque

The Last Of Us

■ **Year:** 2014 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

87 **It's quite possible** that Naughty Dog will never better the brilliance of *The Last Of Us*. Created in a perfect storm of cutting edge visuals, astonishing storytelling and satisfying combat mechanics, it's arguably one of the greatest games ever made. Naughty Dog knows better than anyone how to blend the mechanics of videogames to the cinematic punch of the silver screen and *TLOU* never fails to disappoint. At its heart it's a stealth game, requiring you to navigate the overgrown landscapes of an apocalyptic world while avoiding the dangerous creatures that live there. Along the way you'll be thrown into dynamic sandbox areas that allow you to dispatch the enemies found within them in a variety of inventive ways and you'll slowly warm to the shifting relationship that builds between the grieving middle-aged Joel and his young tempestuous charge, Ellie. It's worth checking out the equally brilliant sequel, too.

©Naughty Dog

88 Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

■ **Year:** 2000 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

It was a case of bigger, better more for Neversoft's sequel. The level design is far better, ensuring every single one is now free roaming. And then of course there's the addition of the slick level editor, which allows you to create parks to your heart's content.

©Neversoft

89 Jak And Daxter: The Precursor Legacy

■ **Year:** 2001 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

Naughty Dog's first PS2 game was a massive step up compared to its PlayStation platformers. The one-sided banter between motor mouth, Daxter and silent partner, Jak worked well, while there was some impressive tech surrounding the huge, lush world that the titular pair explored.

©Naughty Dog

90 Lumines

■ **Year:** 2004 ■ **Platform:** PSP

The block assembling of *Lumines* remains highly entertaining and it's lost none of its appeal over the years. It's far more important to string up combos by over stacking your blocks, so there's a strong risk and reward factor. The frantic block spinning is held together by a sublime soundtrack that really helps you get 'in the zone'.

©Q entertainment

©Konami

Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night

■ **Year:** 1997 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

91 **Koji Igarashi's reinvention** of the *Castlevania* series remains the best game in the franchise and led to him helming one of the most successful Kickstarter campaigns of all time. *Symphony* once again has you battling Dracula in his monolithic castle, but this time the game mechanics have been greatly expanded, creating a truly satisfying game in the process. Unlike the linear stages of old, levels have been weaved together as sections of Dracula's castle, and hero Alucard can access new sections by gaining abilities that transform him into different animals or a cloud of mist (inspired by the shape shifting of *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*). Alucard also has access to a large amount of different weapons and the game also supports light RPG mechanics, making it a huge departure from earlier games in the series. It ended up not only changing the entire direction of the series for years to come, but also led to the Metroidvania subgenre.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

■ **Year:** 2009 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

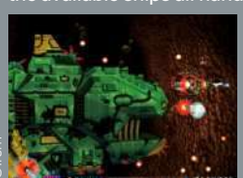
92 **While the original** *Uncharted* was a good slice of *Tomb Raider*-styled fun, the sequel massively improved things. Visually it's outstanding, building on the impressive aesthetics of the original in every way. There's a much bigger focus on set pieces, something that would define the series, including a desperate race through a collapsing building, taking on a tank and that spectacular cliff-hanging train sequence to name just a few. Naughty Dog wasn't just content with greatly improving the core adventure though, also adding an entertaining multiplayer mode that catered for both competitive and co-operative play. If your PS3 is now in the loft, it's now available as part of a remastered trilogy on PlayStation 4.

©Naughty Dog

93 R-Type Delta

■ **Year:** 1998 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation

There are some strong contenders for best 3D shmup on PlayStation, but *R-Type Delta* just nabs it. The level design is exceptional in places, the available ships all handle differently to each other, while it lacks the dourness and dull style of the later *R-Type Final*. Best of all though is how well it captures the essence of the original 2D arcade gems.



©Irem

94 God Hand

■ **Year:** 2006 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

Shinji Mikami's inventive fighter is an excellent twist on the old scrolling beat 'em ups of old with the incorporation of a zany sense of humour and hilarious over-the-top characters. You're able to string together an astonishing number of different combat moves, while the 'God Reel' feature enables you to perform even more outrageous abilities.

©Clover Studio

95 Time Crisis 2

■ **Year:** 2001 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 2

If you want a fantastic arcade lightgun shooter you'll be hard-pressed to topple Namco's excellent sequel. The levels are set-up to create great scoring opportunities and there are some fantastic set pieces as you blast your way through each level. Best of all is the excellent multiplayer mode and the Crisis Mission mode, which is unique to the PS2 version.

©Namco

96 Burnout Paradise

■ **Year:** 2008 ■ **Platform:** PS3

Criterion Games' open world racer pushed its popular series to new limits and still shines today thanks to its recent PS4 remaster. Paradise City is a brilliant place to explore, there are plenty of excellent gameplay modes, including the super 'Cops And Robbers' a host of tweakable options, and the chaotic racing to the start of each race has never been bettered.

©Criterion Games

97 Rogue Legacy

■ **Year:** 2014 ■ **Platform:** PS3, PS4, PS Vita

Roguelikes have become increasingly popular in recent years and this charming platformer from Cellar Door Games remains a firm favourite. What sets *Rogue Legacy* apart is that when you die you continue as a randomly generated heir, with unique traits and disabilities that can affect your next run. There's a fantastic skill tree to abuse, as well.

©Cellar Door Games

98 Dead Space

■ **Year:** 2008 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3

EA's excellent survival horror game proved the genre wasn't just the domain of Capcom and Konami. The mentally unstable Isaac makes for an interesting hero, while the Necromorphs make for a terrifying foe. It's a good job then that Isaac's numerous weapons allows him to dismember them with gusto. The sequel is even more action-packed, but not as well paced.

©EA

Alien Isolation

■ **Year:** 2014 ■ **Platform:** PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4

99 **Creative Assembly took** a break from making critically acclaimed strategy games and made a critically acclaimed horror game instead. *Alien Isolation* is not only the best *Alien* game ever made, but does a truly incredibly job of highlighting just how dangerous HR Giger's creation is. Playing as Amanda Ripley (daughter of Ellen) evasion is the aim of the game as you hide in lockers, crouch behind objects and sneak through vents to avoid your seemingly invincible foe. Along the way you'll pick up weapons (useful for combating the other enemies found on the space station) craft new items and generally do whatever you can to survive.

©Creative Assembly

Hotline Miami

■ **Year:** 2013 ■ **Platform:** PS3, PS Vita

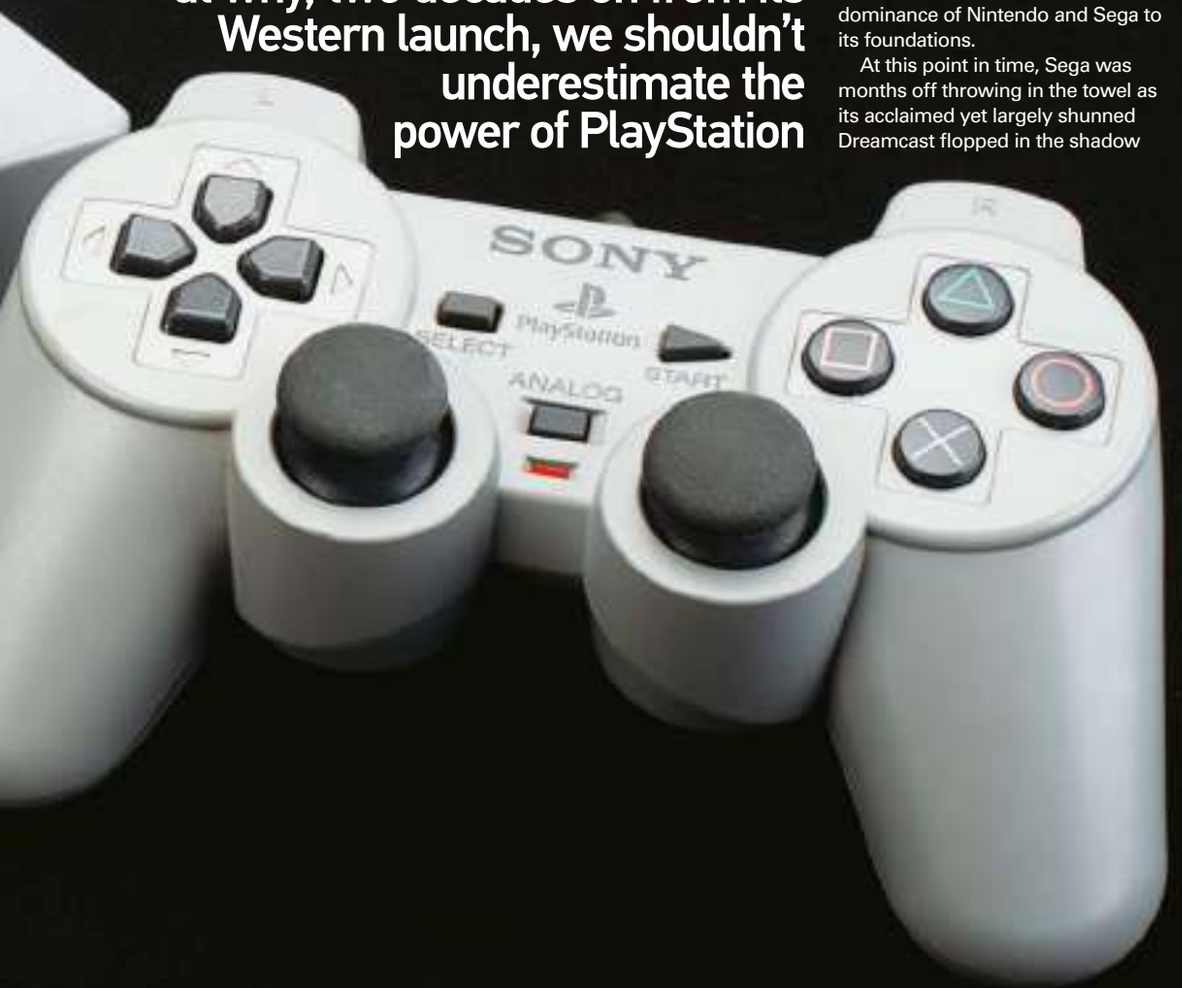
100 **Don't be fooled** by its pixel aesthetic, there's a mean-spirited and brutally violent game lurking beneath *Hotline Miami*'s colourful exterior. Each stage is effectively a mini sandbox, typically revolving around you killing people as quickly as possible. While you're usually unarmed at a stage's start, you can get an overview of each set of rooms, hopefully allowing you to plan out your route in the most effective way possible. Doors can be used as weapons, weapons can be retrieved and stealth can be employed, because death comes quickly and often if you make a mistake. A sequel arrived in 2015, but it lacks the pace of the original.

©Dennaton Games

HOW THE PlayS

tation CHANGED GAMING

It was the console that arguably killed the arcades, but revolutionised the way we played at home. David Crookes looks at why, two decades on from its Western launch, we shouldn't underestimate the power of PlayStation



In 2000, some six years after the PlayStation had launched in Japan and with the PS2 finding its way into the sweaty hands of smitten gamers, Phil Harrison, then senior vice president for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, spoke retrospectively of the ambition of the console brand that shook the dominance of Nintendo and Sega to its foundations.

At this point in time, Sega was months off throwing in the towel as its acclaimed yet largely shunned Dreamcast flopped in the shadow of its Sony rival. The Nintendo 64 was about to be set aside in favour of the GameCube. Atari had long been cast into the wilderness as its final console, the Jaguar, was discontinued in 1994 and its name was on the verge of being sold by Hasbro Interactive to Infogrames.

But Harrison had a different company in mind when he reflected on the manner in which the PlayStation had cleaned up the opposition and made the fifth generation entirely its own. "We wanted it to become the Hoover of videogames," he said, of the aim to make the console late-comer a proprietary eponym. "And, in many ways, it has."

It is fair to say that no gaming machine up until that point had ever had the widespread, mass-market impact of the attractive, CD-playing grey plastic box of tricks that became the PlayStation, as controversial as that may sound. Countless amazing consoles had come before it, but none of them were able to truly break into the mainstream and ▶

» More than two decades ago, we would have never predicted how important this logo would become.

» Although it catered for two players out of the box, it was possible to add more pads with a Multitap.

MARTYN BROWN

VIDEOGAME DEVELOPER AND CONSULTANT

"Back then it was all about 3D and especially the T-Rex demo that was doing the rounds – but we had our greatest PlayStation hit with a 2D game: *Worms*."

none were able to say that, nine years and six months after launch, they had sold 100 million units.

"I think really, the legacy of the original PlayStation is that it took gaming from a pastime that was for young people or maybe for slightly geeky people and it turned it into a highly credible form of mass entertainment, really comparable with great legitimacy with the music business and the movie business," says Sony's current European boss Jim Ryan.

Yet how did a console made by an outsider make such an impact? How did it become so successful that the stars of its games would adorn the covers of fashionable magazines? And why do people talk of the period between 1990 and 2000 as the era of the PlayStation Generation when the console wasn't even around for a good third of that time?

The answer is about to unfold. "I think Sony did a fantastic job in presenting PlayStation as a brand new way of playing and making games," explains Nick Burcombe, the lead designer of seminal title *WipEout*. "Sony's message about how powerful the PlayStation would be prior to launch did enough to get gamers looking at them, even though Sega's Dreamcast also had 3D capabilities and used discs too. Dreamcast was a good console but the message was loud and clear: PlayStation was even better. The message worked well."

The story of the PlayStation's origin has been well told. It's an intriguing tale of two companies; Sony and Nintendo striking a deal in 1988 to create a CD-ROM add-on to the SNES that would use Nintendo "Super Discs". Sony went further and added support for Video CDs and it took advantage of its permission to create its own standalone console which it called the Play Station (note the space), a machine that allowed for the playing of both CDs and cartridge. Sony showed off its creation to great fanfare at that year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in 1991.

PAUL RANSON

FORMERLY OF BIG RED

"Levels, cutscenes and music previously squished into carts could now be developed with panache and in a style that we thought emulated the movie business. PS1 for me was the proper start of the Hollywood style entertainment in the videogame business."

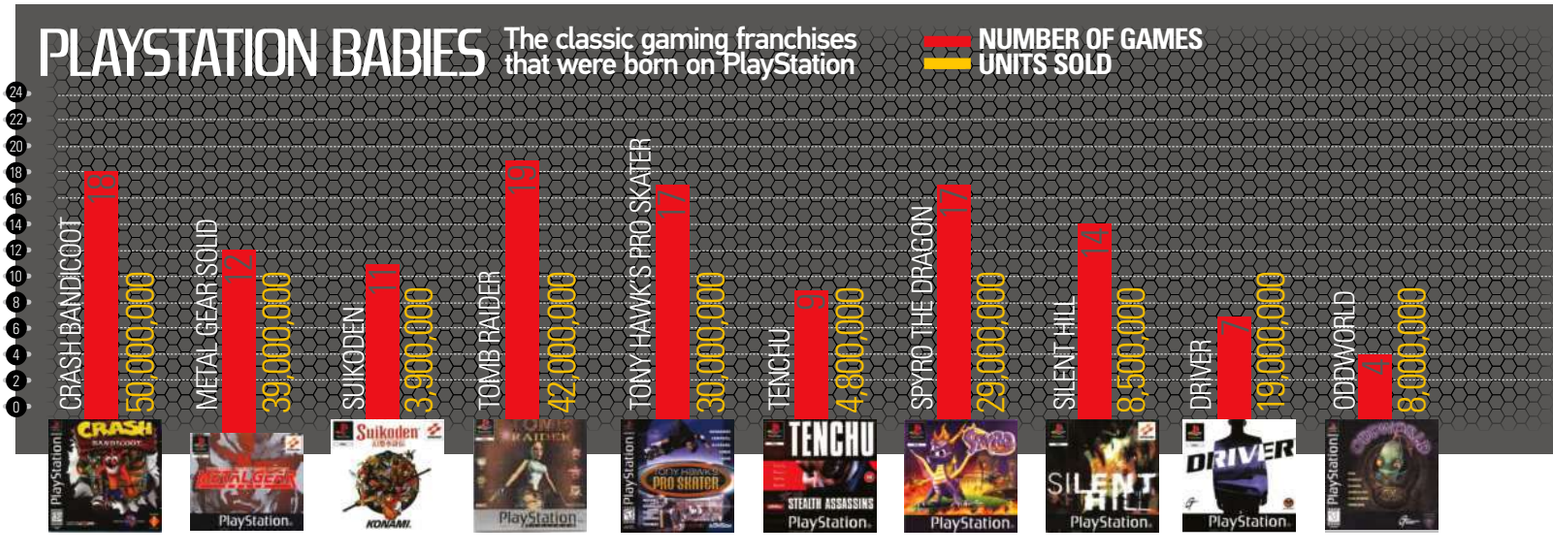
But within mere hours of the unveiling Nintendo got cold feet. It believed Sony could potentially pull the rug from under them and steal a portion of the industry so it cancelled the deal, announcing the day after that it was instead bringing rival Philips on board. Eager not to waste the huge amount of time invested in the project, Sony's president Norio Ohga ordered that development would continue without the experience of Nintendo. Ken Kutaragi who had begun his career in Sony's digital research labs was given the task of designing the machine, which Sony codenamed PSX.

Kutaragi pooled the resources of engineers who had been working on a geometric computer graphics engine called System-G that was capable of real time 3D texture mapping for broadcasting networks. By 1992 he had a prototype ready to show his bosses, but it wasn't an easy ride for Kutaragi and his team. There was much internal resistance to the idea, with

» *Nightmare Creatures* tapped into the survival horror genre.

» Cliff Bleszinski's favourite ever PlayStation game is *Jumping Flash*.

» *Pandemonium* was an early platformer that used 2.5D.



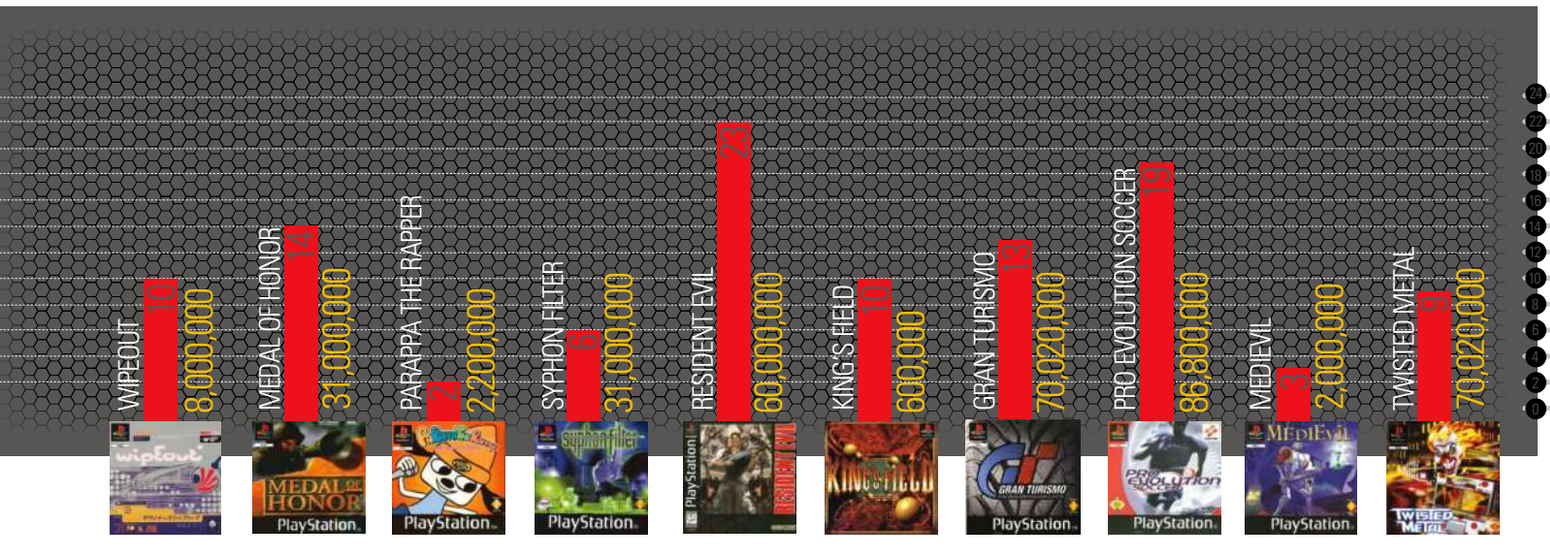
» The PlayStation's CD-ROM-based media ensured far higher capacity than cartridge-based consoles.

DARREN FALCUS
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HIPPO ENTERTAINMENT
"The 3D technology and internal structure meant that it was a much easier technology to develop for."

» That's right, even the power button managed to look sexy on Sony's new console.

» Games required a memory card for saving, something that meant an additional cost for gamers.

» PlayStation's additional ports let Sony add various peripherals to the console.



Sony still, overall, reluctant to become a player in the games industry. Yet Ohga's anger at Nintendo was all that was needed to overrule any doubts.

For Sony's president, it was a case of winning at all costs. He kept the project on track, agreed the purchase of British development house Psygnosis (a startling move, given Japan's previous tendency to invest internally) and, with some refinement and a bit of design prodding, the machine was geared up for launch, first in Japan on 3 December 1994 and then in September 1995 in North America and Europe (selling for £299 in the UK). The console turned heads. "Two words: dinosaur demo," remembers Brian Baglow, writer of the first *Grand Theft Auto*, of the 3D graphic display Sony had slapped on a disc for those who had pre-ordered the console. "As soon as I saw the giant walking T-Rex, I was astonished and awed."

But the dino demo wasn't the only thing that stood out. The PlayStation, which would – thanks to a small redesign and relaunch in 2000 eventually become known as the PSone – had a shapely, comfortable games controller which did away with the flat design of other machines and replaced letters with shapes. It had external memory cards with 15 save blocks that added up to 128k (an idea copied from the Neo-Geo). It also had a slick appearance. More than all of that, though, it had games. Stunning games. And people wanted to play them.

DAVID DARLING

KWALEE CEO & FORMER CODEMASTERS BOSS

"It was the first proper 3D games console to gain significant market share and [Sony was] very active in supporting and encouraging developers. It was fun making games with 3D models and polygons rather than the 2D games we'd made for years on machines like the Sega Mega Drive."

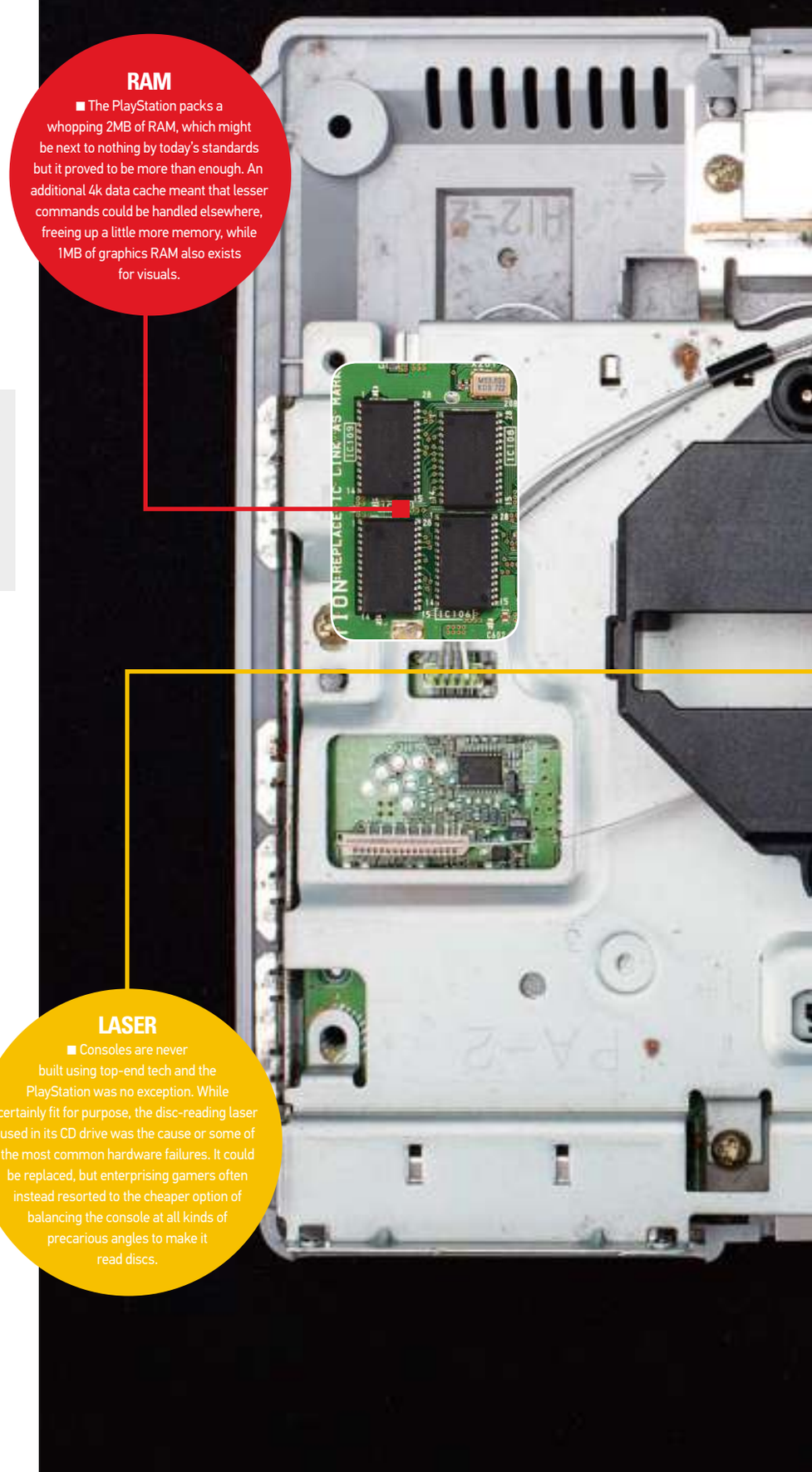
Eight games were available for the PlayStation on the first day but one truly stood out: Namco's *Ridge Racer*. It was an arcade driving sim with chunky 3D cars, wide tracks, catchy tunes and equally memorable speech; it was a title that laid down an ambitious marker and showed games could have just as much impact as music or film.

It was also a near-perfect version of the hit that had been attracting coins at the arcades and it helped

» There was no doubting the significant role that the tomb-raiding Lara Croft played in pushing *Tomb Raider* high in the charts.

UNDER THE HOOD

The components that made the magic happen



RAM

■ The PlayStation packs a whopping 2MB of RAM, which might be next to nothing by today's standards but it proved to be more than enough. An additional 4k data cache meant that lesser commands could be handled elsewhere, freeing up a little more memory, while 1MB of graphics RAM also exists for visuals.

LASER

■ Consoles are never built using top-end tech and the PlayStation was no exception. While certainly fit for purpose, the disc-reading laser used in its CD drive was the cause or some of the most common hardware failures. It could be replaced, but enterprising gamers often instead resorted to the cheaper option of balancing the console at all kinds of precarious angles to make it read discs.

MOTOR

■ That satisfying whirring sound when booting up a new game came from this x2 bad boy, capable of transferring data at 300kb per second. After extended use, the motor could wear out and result in disc read errors, while overuse of the swap trick (to play import games, naturally) could weaken and break the plastic spindle.

CONTROLLER/ MEMORY CARD SLOTS

■ Four front-mounted slots allow for up to two controllers and a pair of memory cards. The controller ports are capable of relaying information and commands from multiple controllers and not just one, as evidenced by the existence of the Multitap. Despite the existence of a second Memory Card slot, some games only allow use of the first.

TRANSFORMER

■ Some consoles use external transformers to keep both size and heat down, but the PlayStation had it all on-board which helps explain its size. Sony was able to shrink the console down for the PSone model in part by moving to an external power transformer on the plug lead rather than having it in the box.

CPU

■ Rocking a 32-bit R3000A processor clocked at just over 33MHz, the PS1 is capable of rendering around 360,000 polygons per second. It serves just as well for 2D games, mind, but few would deny that 3D was what made this console so exciting.

CHARLIE CHAPMAN
NET YAROZE PROGRAMMER

"There's no doubt that the move from cartridges to a CD format reduced the barriers to entry and led to the release of more games which perhaps wouldn't have made it before."

HOW SONY MADE GAMING COOL

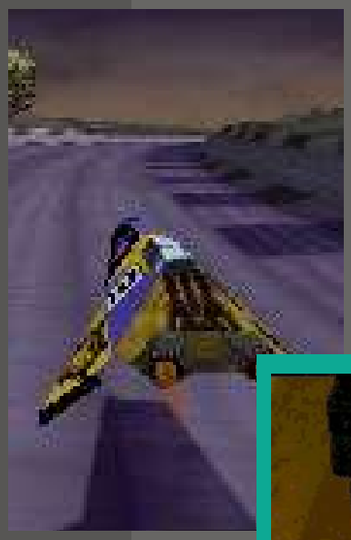
The reasons PlayStation was such an important console

ADVERTS

■ It used to be that advertising agencies would target the same demographic as toy retailers when producing campaigns for games. But by making interesting and original shorts that broke free from that, Sony's marketing proved to generate both conversation and interest in the brand.

NIGHTCLUBS

■ Placing consoles running stylish and exciting games like *WipEout* in bars and nightclubs taught an entire generation one very important lesson – games aren't for kids any more, and there's a lot more to gaming than you might have thought.



GAMES OF SUBSTANCE

■ With so much more storage space, it wasn't just visuals that could be more impressive – worlds and mechanics could be far more intricate than ever before. Only a handful of 16-bit games lasted upwards of 20 hours, but PS1 RPGs would commonly come in closer to 100 hours.

PIRACY

■ What better way to hit the mainstream than to have games available for free? With the web in its infancy, blank discs constantly falling in price and several simple solutions for running unsigned code on PlayStation, piracy was undeniably a huge part of the PlayStation boom.

MATURE GAMES

■ The better graphics got, the more developers were able to use games to tell grown-up stories and faithfully cover topics that simpler visuals perhaps wouldn't do justice. Between visuals, audio and scale, we finally entered an era where games could move and affect players on a similar level to movies. This more emotional connection to games meant that they could be taken a lot more seriously as an entertainment medium.

NINTENDO/SEGA

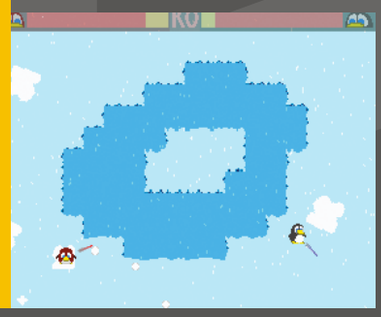
■ A lot of Sony's success came down to a fresh approach to gaming – its competitors had been butting heads for years, leading them to contest the same market. But this just allowed Sony's new audience to appreciate something new even more.

CD FORMAT

■ It used to be that taking a few games around to a friend's house would involve lugging around a bag full of chunky cartridges. With the rise of disc-based media, one game case could hold a collection, plus the format also allowed for better audio quality than older hardware could manage.

NET YAROZE

■ The Net Yaroze provided students and hobbyist programmers with a chance to make PlayStation games, opening up the traditionally closed console development scene. A small community of bedroom coders sprang up as a result.



3D GAMING

■ Clever coding allowed 3D (or 3D-style) visuals on some of the oldest hardware, but it was the scale on which the PS1 hardware was capable of rendering 3D worlds and environments that really blew us all away. Early polygon visuals haven't aged well, but it was so impressive at the time.

» With the tunes from *Parappa The Rapper* staying with players forever, little wonder it helped kickstart the whole rhythm-based genre.

» With a gorgeous opening that showed the power of the PlayStation and great moves, *Tekken II* was a revelation.

» Although it was an below-average release, *Porsche Challenge* didn't half look good.

Sony shift 100,000 PlayStations on the first day in Japan. Before long, impatient punters were splashing out £700 or more to import the console into Europe and the US and the momentum began to build. Those 3D capabilities were a major draw and suddenly gaming began to look more mature, moving away from the perception of kids playing in their darkened bedrooms to something trendy adults wanted to share while sitting on their sofa.

"The PlayStation introduced the idea of true 3D gaming to the living room and, beyond that, the mass market," says Cliff Bleszinski, whose first game *The Palace Of Deceit: Dragon's Plight* was released in 1991. "The PlayStation shifted the console from having an almost toy-like quality into the consumer electronics that are just as desired by 12-year-olds as they are by 35-year-olds."Key to this was getting developers on board and helping them through the transition from 2D to 3D. Before the PlayStation, creating 3D on consoles was no easy task but the PC had shown the possibilities with *Doom*, *Wolfenstein* and *Descent*.

The SNES, for instance, had a Mode 7 playfield which allowed for some pseudo-3D with games such as *Mario Kart* and *Pilotwings* but it could only simulate a single flat-textured plane. "There were a handful of games using the SuperFX chip for SNES, which was a coprocessor that accelerated 3D rendering on the SNES, but it wasn't a fully featured GPU as found in the PS1, and it was quite limited," explains Michael Troughton, who worked on the *Destruction Derby* games for the PlayStation while at Reflections.

"The consoles that were appearing weren't making life any easier. Sega Saturn was a powerful machine with 2 SH2 RISC CPUs and a number of dedicated coprocessors to handle audio, video, sprites and polygons but it was notoriously difficult to program for," says Michael. "Programmers had little experience with multi-processsing and it hindered them. The PlayStation suddenly opened 3D up to a much wider range of developers, with its custom graphics processor and geometry engine in hardware.

"In fact, I remember thinking it was amazing that the PS1 had the same CPU as the £5,000 Silicon graphics workstation we were using to build the 3D environments. Now almost any programmer with a minimal amount of basic maths knowledge could write a 3D game."

MARTIN HOLLIS
WORKED ON GOLDENEYE:007

"Sony cultivated the machine's association with music and club culture. Without this it is difficult to imagine *Dance Dance Revolution*, *SingStar*, *Guitar Hero*, or *Rock Band*."

Fuelled by Namco's racer, sped along by *WipEout* and propelled to a higher platform by *Jumping Flash* (which Cliff Bleszinski says remains his favourite game), 3D became the PlayStation's hallmark and it led to an insatiable demand for three-dimensional titles. Most releases for the console were 3D (the occasional *Oddworld* game aside) and the likes of *Tekken* and *Battle Arena Toshinden* continued to feed the appetite.

This changed videogaming in another way. Given that 3D was more complex, larger development teams were needed. Programmers and artists who struggled to work with 3D found themselves floundering as the new way of presenting games became expected on all platforms, and not just the PS1. "The switch to 3D was a ton of work and it required the relearning of new skills," laments one half of the Pickford Bros development team, Ste Pickford, who designed a kids cartoon game called *DragonTales: Dragon Seek*. "The massive 512 MB CDs we had to fill meant tons more graphics. It was more a feeling of 'Aaargh!' than being blown away."

Sony initially refused to grant concept approval of any 2D game, in its bid to use the beauty of graphics to attract a new breed of gamer. "It meant all game developers had to make 3D games when we were all new to it. I think this sent games backwards for a while because the PlayStation had power to burn for 2D stuff and there could have been some amazing 2D games as we all had the skills and tools to make them," continues Ste.

But as time went on, developers picked up the skills. "I've definitely experienced the hard work that comes with adapting game development to each new generation of consoles," says Michiteru Okabe who produced the art and graphics for *Armoured Core: Master Of Arena* in 1999 and has, more recently, been the producer on *Resident Evil Revelations 2*. He recalls trying to reuse textures to make a massive stage, running out of memory and redesigning it all at the last minute.

Indeed, Paul Hughes, who was working for EA when the PlayStation was launched, tells of Sony's excellent tools, documentation and all important development kit. Sony also revolutionised the technical requirements checklist and this helped to ensure a solid barrier to entry from a quality perspective.

"I found the initial transition pretty painless," he says. "I'd been writing 3D engines since the late Eighties, so I had a reasonable grasp of rendering pipelines – if anything, it was mind-numbing that it had hardware that would draw textured and lit triangles for me rather than having to obsess about every clock cycle of a software triangle rasteriser. From a visual effects perspective, it had proper, honest-to-goodness alpha blending which really helped up the ante for particle/trail/post effects."

Despite the advancements, however, the mainstream press cast doubt on the companies that were newly emerging to take a slice of the digital pie. In May 1995, the *New York Times* ran with the headline "Video Game War Looms In Hardware" and it spoke of the challenge to be dominant in the $4 billion videogame market by "introducing better, faster machines with 32-bit microprocessors that can deliver three-dimensional graphics and quicker and more intricate action than the current 16-bit machines."

Sony, the 3DO Company, and Sega were scorned for offering what were now seen to be comparatively expensive machines. "Nintendo of America and the Atari Corporation are producing machines that retain the familiar cartridge format and sell for considerably less," the piece continued, neglecting to focus on what was really important…

It was the CD-ROM drive that was so important for Sony (which, after all, had invented the CD format in 1982 in collaboration with Philips) and it was, as we saw, the entire reason the company had got involved into the videogame industry in the first place. "Sony was our key partner when we were developing the first CD-ROM games on Genesis," Tom Kalinske, the former CEO of Sega of America tells us, "Back then, none of us knew how to develop on the optical disc media but we all thought it could be great – the future for game machines." It helped to lower the cost of game production, ensuring huge amounts of cash was not tied up in pre-

JAMES RUTHERFORD
NET YAROZE PROGRAMMER WHO LATER WORKED ON STUNTMAN AND DRIV3R

"Net Yaroze added a whole new dimension to the PlayStation and it was great to be able to create games on something that was current and powerful. Having the games on a magazine cover disc was a major incentive for us."

STEWART GILRAY
CEO OF JUST ADD WATER

"You'll have to remember that 20 years ago games simply didn't do 3D at home, at least not as well as the arcades did. So when we got our Japanese import PlayStation at launch with *Ridge Racer*, we all sat around with the joypad in our hands, loaded it up, and raced like we were playing the arcade version. *That* blew us away."

» The PlayStation's pad went through numerous revisions in its live, this one introduced analog sticks.

DUALSHOCK AND AWE

The evolution of the PlayStation pad

PLAYSTATION CONTROL PAD

■ The original controller and our first taste of those iconic button symbols. Also notable for popularising the use of four shoulder buttons, where most major pads would only use two.

DUAL ANALOG

■ With players wanting more precise control for 3D gaming, the Dual Analog was a prayer quickly answered. First-person games could finally be played with tight movement.

DUALSHOCK

■ Effectively the same as the previous controller, with motors fitted into each handgrip for vibration. It also brought two additional buttons, namely L3 and R3 mapped to clicking the analog sticks.

DUALSHOCK 2

■ While cosmetically and technically very similar to the original DualShock (to the point where originals would work on PS2 as well), there was one major change: every major button was analog rather than digital.

DUAL ANALOG

■ With players wanting more precise control for 3D gaming, the Dual Analog was a prayer quickly answered. First-person games could finally be played with tight movement, while inventive devs could create quirky uses for a pair of sticks, as seen with launch title *Ape Escape*.

» Some tried to make out that Crash Bandicoot was the PlayStation mascot but, as it turned out, the machine didn't need a Mario or Sonic equivalent.

booked cartridge stock that may well not have sold. "The move to disc was a huge but natural and necessary change," says Dave Ranyard, the current London Studio boss of SCEE. "Prior to that, we had cartridges and before that dedicated machines, but the ability to store tons more data for our games improved them no end, graphically, musically, and in terms of scope. Disc is a very cheap and efficient method of distributing lots of data."

The disc also allowed for the streaming of a lot of data. Movies could play back in 16-bit colour thanks to the dedicated MDEC hardware. "Then of course you had CD quality audio that you could stream off the media rather than a MIDI track with less than stellar instruments," says Paul Hughes. "Everything about it just oozed quality – right from the boot-up sequence."

PlayStation cemented CD soundtracks as the standard throughout the industry. Until that point most gamers were content with the chip-music that consoles offered, excellent as it was. "But after people started hearing tracks they recognised by the Chemical Brothers and Leftfield in their games, chip-music became unacceptable really fast," says Colin Anderson, who headed up the audio team at DMA Design from 1993 to 2000 before leaving to create Denki, the world's first digital toy company.

"It kicked off some sizeable investment in audio development as teams struggled to switch from chip-music to full CD-quality soundtracks," he continues. "I enjoyed a front row seat on that particular roller-coaster as we were working on the audio design for the game that would eventually become *Grand Theft Auto.* When we started development we fully expected to be using chip-music, but within six months it became clear we needed to up our game if we wanted to compete with all the other great games that were being released. *WipEout* was the straw that finally helped me convince [boss] Dave Jones that DMA needed its own music studio."

The PlayStation tapped into modern-day culture like no other games console had ever achieved before, positioning itself in style mags and persuading celebrities to grab a joypad in the wake of videogames' new cool status. ("I was getting carried away playing *Tekken II* and *Tomb Raider* for hours on end," excused England goalkeeper David James when he conceded three times against Newcastle in 1997.)

But music and the PlayStation, in particular, went hand-in-hand. Developers started to experiment with audio, putting it at the heart of titles such as *Vib-Ribbon* and *PaRappa The Rapper* which led to rhythm-based game crazes such as *Dance Dance Revolution.* They also tapped into the Nineties music vibe of techno and house. The PlayStation ingratiated itself with the growing underground club culture and the sound of big names such as Orbital, Leftfield and The Future Sound Of London.

In Liverpool, where *WipEout* was made, the emerging super-club Cream was positively surreal. Bass pounded, strobes flashed, people danced and then, they stopped, they stared, they gravitated towards the PlayStation pods that had been placed there, just as they had in dozens of other clubs up and down the country, and they played. "We knew something significant about gaming had changed," continues Nick Burcombe, who now heads up Playrise Digital. "It was pretty amazing really."

In London, New York, Tokyo and hundreds of cities in between, clubbers were relaxing between DJ sets with a few rounds of *Virtua Fighter* or *WipEout,* which was the first game to incorporate licensed music. "PlayStation was bringing gaming out of the bedroom and into the mainstream in a way no other company had," says Colin. "That's what changed gaming forever. It wasn't the hardware."

Aggressive infiltration of this kind, together with an approach to marketing that was wildly different to much of what had gone before was repositioning gaming as a cool pursuit. "At the time of its

ESSENTIAL EXTRAS

Six of the best Sony peripherals

x5 images © Evan-Amos

POCKETSTATION

■ Effectively a portable device akin to the Dreamcast's VMU, PocketStation never saw the light of day outside of Japan. Over 50 games supported this interesting device, which plugged into the console via the memory card port and had its own LCD screen.

MEMORY CARD

■ While cartridges sometimes allowed game data to be saved to internal memory, the CD format offered no such luxury. Sony's solution was a proprietary storage solution – a 15-block 1MB memory card to which game data could be saved.

MULTITAP

■ Two controller ports was enough for most games but to fully enjoy something like *Micro Machines V3* (whose predecessor had additional ports built into the cartridge itself) or Bomberman, you'd need more. Enter the Multitap.

GUNCON

■ Light gun arcade games were all the rage around the time the PS1 rose to power, and this accessory, originally released to allow *Time Crisis* to be played at home, proved to be one of the most accurate home approximations of the arcade experience.

GAMESHARK

■ Plugging into the console's parallel port, these cheat devices allowed game code to be modified to activate cheats, alter elements of a game or even to access content that wasn't in the final build, including additional scenes in *Final Fantasy VII.*

DUALSHOCK 3

■ As costs fell and tech improved, Sony was soon able to reintroduce rumble to the Sixaxis template and the DualShock 3 was born. It quickly superseded its forerunner as the PS3 standard and Sixaxis was discontinued in mid-2008.

DUALSHOCK 4

■ The first full evolution in the life of the DualShock, the PS4 pad adds many new features. Sixaxis motion control remains, with a rear-mounted light bar allowing a camera to better place the handset for accuracy. It also adds a touch pad and Options and Share keys.

» *WipEout* was one of the UK launch titles for the PlayStation and it took both the gaming and the wider world by storm.

launch I was a student and I'd always been into videogames from the early days of arcades," says Dave. "I would hang around playing *Space Invaders* and *Galaxians* and until the PS1 came out, that kind of thing made me a geek. But this console changed all that – suddenly videogames were cool – not just acceptable, but actually club culture cool. With a soundtrack from the coolest techno and dance DJs, videogames became a part of sub-culture. And it led to a more mainstream acceptance of consoles in general."

It helped the console to continue to attract adults, a strategy that Sega had already begun but Sony seemed to perfect. One of the keys to this was Steve Race, boss of Sony Computer Entertainment of America. Race had worked under Kalinske at Sega and he had no problem competing with his former workers (indeed, he infamously took to the stage at the inaugural E3 in Los Angeles just after Sega had announced the Sega Saturn at a price point of $399, muttering one word – "$299" – and walking off to great applause).

"Steve knew our strategies of going after an older audience and being edgy and competitive in advertising," continues Tom Kalinske. "He knew we would do everything we could to come across as the superior 'cool' brand, and he did this very well. But I don't think Sony did anything other than copy lots of aggressive marketing that we had done at Sega initially with Genesis." And yet, Sony took its marketing to a different level.

Although ads did target children (*Croc* was plastered on bus shelters near schools) titles like *Resident Evil* were certainly aimed at an older audience and developers did all they could to grab their attention. The disgraced former publicist Max Clifford used the tabloid press to whip up a publicity frenzy for controversial titles. Games such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Cool Boarders 2* made the papers by talking of "having to get higher than last time" in ads (Darren Carter, the then senior product manager at SCEE, defended this move, saying, "the wording is genuinely how snowboarders talk").

One of the most memorable adverts, though, was *Double Life* which had been created by ad agency TBWA. Written by James Sinclair, it became a classic, its lengthy monologue showcasing eccentric individuals describing what they did in their free time. "I won't deny I've engaged in violence, even indulged in it," says one, to the tune of Fauré's *Requiem* as he describes – the viewer discovers later – his fantasy PlayStation life. In 2007, the advert, directed by Frank Budgen, was accepted into the Clio Hall of Fame.

Sony's brief was to the point. It wanted to "break out of a core consumer base of geeky pubescent teenage boys by bringing a broader acceptability and dignity that was absent from the sector." Sinclair cross-cast the advert, showing policemen breaking the law and vicars committing all sorts of sins ("this got softened somewhat – inevitably," he tells us). The idea was to put people at the centre of gaming. The advert contained no gameplay footage or screenshots.

"People's imagination is the most powerful element of the gaming experience, more than the graphics, sound effects, atmosphere and so on. That's what really puts them in the moment," James says of the ad that was shot for television and cinema. "I'd thrown in some off-the-beaten-track words and phrases like 'hoi polloi' to give the piece a sort of anachronistic vibe. It gave it a timelessness that has served it well over the years."

STEVE LYCETT SUMO DIGITAL

"To understand the impact, you've got to remember that when we first got our hands on the PlayStation hardware it was a revelation on a number of fronts. First, it was the first proper dedicated 3D console – this is in a pre-3DFX/PowerVR accelerated PC graphics era, too. So the results you could achieve quickly and easily were way in front of anything else. Next, having spent so long working with limited cartridge budgets, having a whole CD you could fill and plenty of memory (2MB was a lot back then!) opened the door to bigger levels, better audio, cutscenes and really going to town on the presentation as much as the game. You could say any one of those components existed individually, but it was the PlayStation that pulled it all together in one powerful and complete package."

» As the sequel to *Flashback*, the action-adventure *Fade To Black* only made it to the PlayStation (and PC).

And yet, away from the camera, Sony was putting games centre stage, signing exclusive deals for the best games, among them *Tomb Raider*. The second and third titles in the series made the PlayStation their console home and it led to increased sales. "I remember getting our hands on the original *Tomb Raider* when we were working on the original *GTA* and thinking, 'Oh f***',' says Brian, on the impact the game had.

But it wasn't hard to persuade companies to climb aboard. "Behind the scenes, Sony offered developers a better deal than its competitors," says David Banner who worked on *Tomb Raider* as a tester. "It gave better royalties and it promoted games well. It understood that having the best console relies on having content so the more developers it got on board the more titles it'd have for the customer to digest. Nintendo and Sega primarily relied on their titles being developed in-house, whereas Sony saw the potential of opening up development to third party developers."

Those third-party developers seized this opportunity, understanding what a console with such a large user base could offer. Programmers and artists looked for new ways to take advantage of 3D and they also sought to tap into current trends such as extreme sports, generating games like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* and leading to many a big budget PlayStation event. Over the course of the PlayStation's lifetime, the age of developers also began to rise, with graduates seeing a stable career path in the industry. "Two of the guys on the *Destruction Derby* team were still in their teens – that would be unheard of today," says Michael.

That said, Sony also came to embrace smaller, independent developers by releasing a development kit called the Net Yaroze. The problem with previous consoles was the cost of developing for the systems. They were, by and large, closed shops. But with Net Yaroze, a small outlay was enough to bag a kit and start making games, some of which ended up on the cover disc of the *Official PlayStation Magazine* which,

» *Ridge Racer Revolution* was the chunky car sequel to *Ridge Racer* but the gameplay remained entirely unchanged.

THE 20 MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN PLAYSTATION HISTORY

SONY GOES IT ALONE

1 After talks with Nintendo to develop a disc-based add-on for the SNES, Nintendo shockingly revealed a partnership with Philips, which ultimately came to nothing. Sony's work was not in vain, however – the groundwork for PlayStation had already been done.

ARCADE-PERFECT PORTS

2 Flick through old magazines and you'll find the term 'arcade perfect' applied in so many inaccurate ways. With *Ridge Racer* and the many coin-op ports that followed, though, it really *was* true a lot of the time.

CD CAPACITY = BIGGER GAMES

3 Cartridges could only allow a certain amount of data to be stored, with no easy way of swapping between them. The compact disc medium changed this, allowing for console games that spanned as many as five discs.

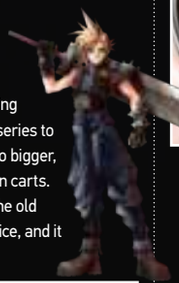
PLATINUM PRICING

4 With gaming growing more popular, Sony made the smart move of adding its most successful games into the Platinum range, slashing prices to help them shift more copies.

ANYONE CAN MAKE GAMES

5 The Net Yaroze remains one of the coolest hardware iterations ever, a developer console that effectively anyone was able to create games for. The best of these would be showcased via the official mag's demo discs.

FINAL FANTASY JUMPS SHIP



6 The only way for something as epic as Square's RPG series to evolve was to go 3D and to go bigger, a combination not possible on carts. With Nintendo still backing the old format, Square had little choice, and it was a huge coup for Sony.

MARKET AWARENESS

7 Smart advertising made PlayStation the coolest brand in gaming in the space of a few relatively simple campaigns – Sony managed to build the idea of gaming being something more than just a nerdy pastime in mere months.

JUST DANCE

8 Cheap plastic dance mats are nothing compared to the glorious coin-op stages (assuming they work properly) upon which the best perform, but bedroom pop stars didn't care. It just felt good to step on arrows.

SWAP TRICK

9 Who *didn't* know the method of getting import games and even illegal copies running on a PS1? Broken spindles and motors were common, but you could play whatever you wanted.

SMALLER, YET SMARTER

10 A revised PlayStation known as the PSone launched in 2000, with its little form and more cost-effective use of components allowing Sony to sell it for less than the original console. It also did away with many popular piracy methods.

GTA3 INVENTS A GENRE

11 DMA's silly crime sprees were fun, but *GTA* only really shot to notoriety when contained realistic and free open-world sociopathy.

DON'T HATE THE PLAYER, HATE THE GAME BOY

12 Sony's plan for Vita was simple – take on Nintendo's handheld dominance by offering console-quality games on the go. Despite huge *Monster Hunter*-fuelled success in Japan, neither PSP nor Vita really managed to break the western market, but Sony still

DVD READY

13 Choosing DVD as a primary format for games was risky, but it also placed the PS2 among the most affordable DVD players available during the format's boom. Want a DVD player? Might as well get one that plays games too...

LEAP YEAR BLUES

14 Original PS3 models were hit by a bizarre bug on 1 March 2010 when an error on the console's internal calendar assumed incorrectly that 2010 was a leap year and proceeded to implode on itself.

LIGHTS, CAMERA...

15 The rise of EyeToy led many (including, the other modern major platform holders, apparently) into believing motion control was the future. At least everyone got that wrong, but it was fun while it lasted.

$599

16 The announcement that the PS3 would be worth getting a second job to pay for didn't do all that much to help its early performance – Sony had to do a lot of work to get it even close to the 360 in terms of units sold.

PSN HACKED

17 In April 2011, Sony's PSN network was hacked and the details of around 77 million users compromised in the process. The downtime lasted for several weeks and while something of a disaster, it clearly taught Sony some valuable lessons as it hasn't fallen foul to a similarly devastating attack since.

PS PLUS

18 With Microsoft hiding online play behind a paywall, Sony played it smart – keep online play free (at least on PS3) and instead offer free games for recurring subscribers. The model works, and even third-parties are getting involved now.

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO...

19 Sony's confidence in countering every poor decision made by Microsoft was an easy highlight of E3 2013, but the brazen approach to everything – including pricing – easily explains Sony's return to prominence for this new generation of consoles.

LOVING THE INDIES

20 Whatever you think about Sony's triple-A PS4 line-up, its selection of indie and retro titles is superb. From *Resogun* and *Oddworld* to *Grim Fandango* and *Final Fantasy VII* (a PC port, sure, but it's better than nothing, right?), Sony is doing its bit to keep old-school gameplay alive.

LAUNCH GAMES REVISITED

Sony's PlayStation launch games are now more than two decades old. We were keen to see how they still fare...

KILEAK: THE BLOOD

"This failed to impress gamers 20 years ago, and it's still a shambles today. The lo-fi visuals and clunky controls are rather charming, but the deathly dull gameplay creates a miserable gaming experience"

DARRAN

NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION

"Visually, this isn't too much of a jump up from the previous generation, but as far as gameplay goes, this still stands up today as a great game to play with friends, even if I am still terrible at it even all these years later..." **JON**

STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE

"This is a great game for all the wrong reasons. The animation is laughably poor, while the difficulty level is all over the place. It's nowhere near as dull to play as *Toshinden*, but it remains a disappointingly average brawler" **DARRAN**

LAUNCH GAMES*

- **A-TRAIN IV EVOLUTION** JAPAN
- **BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN** US/UK
- **CRIME CRACKERS** JAPAN
- **ESPN EXTREME GAMES** US
- **GOKUJÖ PARODIUS DA! DELUXE PACK** JAPAN
- **KILEAK: THE BLOOD** US/UK
- **MAHJONG GOKU SKY** JAPAN
- **MAHJONG STATION MAZIN** JAPAN
- **NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION** US/UK
- **NEKKETSU OYAKO** JAPAN
- **POWER SERVE 3D** US
- **THE RAIDEN PROJECT** US
- **RAPID RELOAD** UK
- **RAYMAN** JAPAN
- **RIDGE RACER** US/UK
- **STREET FIGHTER: THE MOVIE** US/UK
- **TAMA** JAPAN
- **TOTAL ECLIPSE TURBO** US
- **WIPEOUT** UK

*IT'S WORTH NOTING THAT EVEN SONY UK DOESN'T HAVE COMPLETE LISTINGS, BUT RESEARCH SUGGESTS THE ABOVE LIST IS CORRECT

RAPID RELOAD

"It's not quite as good as *Gunstar Heroes*, which it is clearly trying to imitate, but it's still a great blaster that's probably more appreciated now than it was back then" **NICK**

CHARLES CECIL

REVOLITION SOFTWARE BOSS AND CREATOR OF BROKEN SWORD

"The PlayStation oozed sex appeal. Sony's inspired marketing quickly made videogames hip. And the team at Sony were amazing – a small team of inspirational, creative people who were re-defining the industry: re-writing the rule book. The two *Broken Sword* games were incredibly well received, being voted amongst the top ten best PlayStation games by *Official PlayStation Magazine* readers. PlayStation launched a new epoch."

BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN

"I'd probably have been thrilled at the time with this, but while it looks the business it just doesn't play that well. It's easy to see how *Tekken* became more popular..." **NICK**

RIDGE RACER

"Riiiiiidge Raaaaaaacer! Yes there's only one track, but what a track! It still controls exceptionally well, while the jaunty music and challenging track design will keep you chasing those top times"
DARRAN

JUMPING FLASH

"This was probably just as odd a game back then as it is now, but I can imagine that for its time it really stood out from anything else. The soundtrack is definitely worth a mention as well" **JON**

thanks to the number of demos it would give away, began to reach a sales figure of over 450,000.

"We used the Net Yaroze to teach console programming at the University of Abertay in Dundee at a time when educational establishments could not get their hands on the full development kit," says Professor Ian Marshall, whose department at the Uni received a staggering 40 Net Yaroze kits for its computer games technology Masters and Undergraduate students. "It was close enough to the real thing that transferring from Net Yaroze to the full dev kit did not take much re-learning."

As a result, scores of student programmers were able to write tight code to run on a PlayStation and it opened up a vibrant community of home developers across the world. Just as the Spectrum and BBC Micro created many of the leading UK games developers of the Eighties, so the Net Yaroze contributed to the development of the independent and studio developers we have today. Mitsuru Kamiyama created the RPG *Terra Incognita*. He ended up working on the *Final Fantasy* series which, despite having made its debut on the NES, became one of the PlayStation's most popular titles.

Final Fantasy was one of a large number of games that made the PlayStation such an iconic hit. While Nintendo continued to concentrate on Mario and Sega

PATRICK BUCKLAND

CEO, STAINLESS GAMES

"I was actually involved with them pre-launch. Sony was determined not to fall into the same trap as the CDi and the 3DO and try to be everything to all men. They were clearly a games console through and through, not a multimedia device. They also took the start that Sega had made with the Mega Drive and made the PlayStation a games console that you didn't feel embarrassed of."

on Sonic, Sony had no real mascot despite desperate attempts by some players and media to intrinsically link Crash Bandicoot to it. Instead it heralded an eclectic era of massive franchises that ran and ran, from *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider* and *Tekken* to *WipEout* and *Grand Theft Auto*.

In May 1998, Chris Deering, then president of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, said five or more games were being sold per PlayStation – "at least 50 per cent better than it ever got on 16-bit". Then, the average age for a PlayStation gamer was 22. It was keeping the Eighties kids playing while attracting brand new audiences.

Sony continued to tinker. It advanced on the N64's Rumble Pak with the DualShock pad in 1998 bringing vibration feedback and it introduced a Platinum budget range for older games that had sold more than 150,000 copies, which included the likes of *TOCA*, *Die Hard Trilogy*, *Fade To Black*, *Time Crisis*, and *V-Rally*. The PlayStation was also keeping pace: games made at the end of the PS1's life were far more visually stunning than those at the start.

"Sony jumped into the games business, disrupted it and succeeded in much the same way that Apple jumped into the portable music business and took over," says Michael Troughton. "The branding was cool, the device was powerful, the technology was good, the business model was better and the timing was right. All of these things made it successful."

THE DRIFT KING

It made a big impact when it drifted into arcades in 1993, before making an even bigger one a year later when it showed off the impressive power of Sony's Playstation. Retro Gamer looks through a rose-tinted rear-view to remember the racing history of Riiiiiiidge Racer

Arcade gaming and arcade ports saw something of a renaissance in the Nineties thanks to the arrival of popular coin-ops such as *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*. Their close relationship went all the way when hardware and software developers began experimenting with comparable arcade and console technology, causing a significant shift to occur as the coin-op and domestic game markets never looking so comparable. Reigniting creativity and imagination as limitations lifted, a raft of popular polygonal 3D games emerged as two of the biggest forces in arcade gaming at the time, Namco and Sega, came to dominate the 3D arcade market, sparking an epic rivalry between the two companies that spilled into our homes.

That shift of battlefield came to put a considerable strain on the coin-op market as the popularity of home gaming increased, thanks largely to Sony's canny marketing and positioning of the PlayStation. When the expected finally happened, and console games began matching and later eclipsing arcade games in visual fidelity, many no longer saw the value or need to play games on vend. Piers and holiday camps, formerly the reserves for high-fidelity gaming, became like gaming cinemas, showing us 'coming soon' titles that, in a few short months, we would be able to play nigh-on arcade-perfect versions of in the comfort of our living rooms. But as this entertaining battle for arcade supremacy raged on, it was a pretty fantastic time to be a gamer – an exciting period filled with great arcade releases and arcade conversions.

A game emblematic of this technical gap-bridging between the two markets was Namco's *Ridge Racer*. A racing game designed for and debuting in arcades, it found a welcome home on the PlayStation when it was flawlessly converted as a launch game for the machine in December 1994.

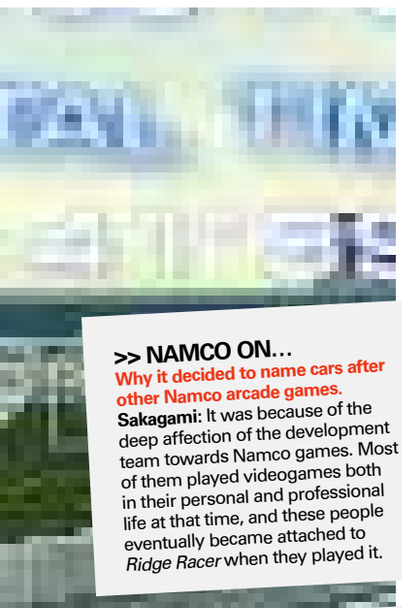
As detailed in our exclusive making of in issue 52, *Ridge Racer* was a concept brought about by brand new PCB technology that Namco had in development, dubbed Namco System 22, that was able to generate striking texture-mapped polygons. Wanting to showcase the technology, Namco turned to the racing genre, this being a common practice by arcade developers – see Sega's *Hang-On*, *Virtua Racing* and *Daytona USA*, and Namco's own *Pole Position*. Incidentally, this is also the reason why *Ridge Racer* has appeared as a launch game for so many machines since.

"In racing games, you can build a vast space structure; create elaborate, realistic visuals; and process a complex, high-speed program," explains Namco's Masanori Kato. "So, I think this is an appropriate subject to first try out the potential of new hardware. Besides, the rules are simple, and no matter the maker of the game, the operations are the same. I think most people don't need to read the manual to understand that they have to race to the finish line. When you get a new piece of hardware, you want to experience something surprising straight away. Isn't it annoying if you have to read all the manual instructions and tips first? For that reason, when you play *Ridge Racer* on a newly acquired piece of hardware, you can enjoy the surprising experience right away, so I think it is the most appropriate launch title."

The original plan was to create an F1 game using the technology, but this idea was soon dropped in favour of doing something far more accessible, based on a trend that was occurring in Japan's booming car enthusiast scene at the time.

"There was a trend among young people in Japan for tuning their cars," Namco Bandai general manager Yozo Sakagami

» *Ridge Racer Revolution* became a popular sequel not just due to having improved visuals and new modes but also thanks to its two-player link-up games only requiring a single disc to work.



>> NAMCO ON…

Why it decided to name cars after other Namco arcade games.

Sakagami: It was because of the deep affection of the development team towards Namco games. Most of them played videogames both in their personal and professional life at that time, and these people eventually became attached to *Ridge Racer* when they played it.

>> NAMCO ON…

Whether it was pleased with *Ridge Racer*'s success on the PlayStation.

Sakagami: From the very first *Ridge Racer* until *R4*, they were developed for the PlayStation. During that period, we received the kind support of many players. I think the fact that *Ridge Racer* was a PlayStation launch title contributed a lot as well. At the beginning of the development, there was a time when there was some doubt as to whether any third-party could really develop a game on the PlayStation hardware. Around this time we had a meeting with the software engineering team, and when they showed us the first development build of *Ridge Racer* we felt certain that they really could succeed in making this game work on the PlayStation hardware. I believe that this played a big role, not only with *Ridge Racer*, but also in driving the overall development of games on the PlayStation.

▶ tells us when explaining how the concept behind *Ridge Racer* originated, "and they liked to race on winding mountain roads. They didn't want to slow down when they took corners, so they started drifting their cars and crossing over the boundary line of the road. Of course, this is completely forbidden. At that point, we thought: 'Can we make a racing game in which the driver pushes his driving abilities to the maximum and gets a feeling of extreme speed?' So we created a game in which we let the player experience the sensations of manipulating a car at high speed and mastering corner drift."

While realism took a bit of a back seat, beneath *Ridge Racer*'s colourful exterior, brash J-pop techno beats and videogame liveries roared impressive technical grunt and a keen focus on the thrill of the race. Its signature focus on drifting, which remains a staple in the series, allowed racers to experience the sensation of taking corners at breakneck speed while at the same time giving them the unnerving but equally exhilarating sense of momentarily losing control of their vehicle. Proof that *Ridge Racer* was never intended to be a realistic driving simulator but designed to be a fun and exhilarating racing experience.

It was in April 1994 that work at Namco began on porting *Ridge Racer* to the PlayStation. The two biggest challenges the conversion team faced in porting the game to the machine was how to replicate the 'feel' on the PlayStation's D-pad controller, and also how to alleviate the issue of CD-ROM reading times, with Namco concerned that it would be an issue for console gamers spoiled on immediate cartridge gaming. Aware that it would be unable to fully avoid the latter issue, the team came up with a clever workaround: it would have the majority of the game data recovered at the start of the game, and as this data was being read would entertain users with a playable version of Namco's 1979 classic, Galaxian. Furthermore, beating it could unlock new cars in the main game.

Similarly, on the other issue of control, Namco knew that it would have to do the best with the tools Sony had given it, meaning the responsibility to improve the experience of Ridge Racer for PlayStation owners was its own. Therefore, shortly after Ridge Racer's launch in Japan, Namco released the neGcon controller. Designed for racing games, it featured two twistable halves connected by a swivel joint that allowed the user to rotate each part for precision steering and drifting in the game. In addition to this, two analogue buttons afforded smooth and gradual control over acceleration and braking. A successor to the controller, the Jogcon, was later packed with special editions of *Ridge Racer Type 4*, offering force feedback and a unique jogging dial to mimic a steering wheel.

The PSone conversion of *Ridge Racer* introduced aspects that would become staples in the series, including mirror mode, a means to eke more from the game's single track by having players race it in reverse; a third-person camera; and additional cars to drive over the two in the arcade game. Garnering huge profits for arcade operators before becoming a popular launch game for the PlayStation, quickly sequels followed, beginning with an arcade sequel, *Ridge Racer 2*, in 1994. More an update of the original arcade game, *Ridge Racer 2* featured no new tracks over the first game but added new aspects such as night driving, a rear-view mirror and, most notably, multiplayer.

A proper sequel to *Ridge Racer* came the following year. *Rave Racer* ran on the same hardware as its predecessors but built on the original game brilliantly. Once again, players raced long and short versions of the original track, but this time two new circuits were added. These tracks, City and Mountain, were brilliant additions, with City inviting players to scud along a wide urban overpass embedded in an impressive cityscape, while the challenging Mountain stage could be seen as the opposite: a rural route that snaked through a beautiful rocky vista, decorated with valleys and canyons. *Rave Racer* also marked the first ever appearance of popular *Ridge Racer* race queen Reiko Nagase, though it wouldn't be until the release of *Rage Racer* that the character was officially named.

> **"I think racing is an appropriate subject to try out the potential of new hardware"** MASANORI KATO

Considering how great a sequel *Rave Racer* was, it remains a bit of a mystery among fans as to why the game was never ported to the PlayStation. Knowing that a version was mooted and got to tech demo stage for high-performance PCs, we speculate that the reason might lie with technical limitations, but Sakagami puts us straight on the matter.

"Following the first *Ridge Racer*, the objective to convert the games to home consoles during development only came after *Ridge Racer Revolution*. *Rave Racer* had already been developed

Mini making of Ridge Racer

Where did the concept for *Ridge Racer* originate?
First of all, it's important to state that Ridge Racer was developed to make use of some newly completed polygon-capable PCB technology, albeit in the form of a proper game. I think it's fair to say Ridge Racer's concept was an idea born from polygon PCB technology.

Is it true that *Ridge Racer* was going to use Formula 1 cars?
At that time in Japan, the thinking was, 'If you're going to make a car racing game, take Formula 1 as a theme', so at first we considered making *Ridge Racer* with Formula 1-style cars." But the result of that consideration was a number of different concepts which informed the final version of *Ridge Racer*: the game had to be 'on public roads', 'with machines like passenger vehicles', and it had to 'encourage players to use drift techniques'. If we had gone with a Formula 1 style of racing game, would *Ridge Racer* have been so loved by players?

Why did you make an arcade racer?
As people who know the game will appreciate, *Ridge Racer* is not a realistic 'driving simulator. Of course *Ridge Racer* had a high level of programming technology and graphics techniques, but more than that, I think it was a game with a strong sense of good taste. Players back in the day were able to race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling, because it was a first-class racing game. It wasn't advanced simulation programming that made that possible, though – I think it was down to the advanced sense of game design.

Was there any competition with other arcade developers like Sega?
At that time, we were racing against one of our rival companies who also had a 'polygonal racing game' in development, so we were doing our best to make sure that our game was finished first – even if by just one day – and was more entertaining. I think the other company was probably in the same position, racing against us.

How many people worked on *Ridge Racer*?
I can't answer this in detail, but the number of team members was much smaller than what most people would imagine.

Tell us about *Ridge Racer's* soundtrack.
Can you believe that initially we were planning to have no music in the game? *Ridge Racer's* music was produced at the same time as the game itself. We didn't have time in our schedule for a surplus of tracks to be composed, so that we could pick our favourites at the end of development – that just wasn't possible. We were lucky to happen upon danceable techno music for the BGM, which really helped with the process of creating this atmosphere where players could race through the game and enjoy a fun feeling.

Why did you create the original arcade cabinets?
The theme of the game was to put you in control of a high-power sports car, enabling you to hold the steering wheel to drive through curves and bends while skidding from side to side. Therefore, it was necessary that the steering wheel conveyed the response of the tyres in a way that players could actually feel. We had H-type gears, a clutch pedal, a large seat, and so on, all prepared so that the feeling of driving a real sports car could be conveyed properly."

Did you worry how *Ridge Racer* would be received outside of Japan?
In those days, we didn't really think in terms of 'intended for Japan' or 'geared towards the West'. We were developing *Ridge Racer* to make players experience a happy feeling, and that sense of happiness from playing games we felt was enjoyed by everyone in the global community of players.

at that time. This being said, it's not entirely true that *Rave Racer* was never converted to home consoles. In fact, we kept in mind the fact that there is a woman in the opening of *Rave Racer*. This was the introduction of Reiko Nagase. Also, the *Rave Racer* circuits were incorporated in the PSP *Ridge Racer* games, so the game hasn't been released for home consoles as a standalone, but over the course of time, all of its content has found its way into the *Ridge Racer* series."

PlayStation owners really didn't have cause to be too disappointed, though, as the console received its own exclusive sequel that same year. Despite improved visuals, two new vehicles and a couple of new tracks, *Ridge Racer Revolution* stuck close to the original template, particularly in terms of how you progressed through the game. The notable new things that Namco introduced in *Revolution* included two-player link-up races, made better by the fact that you only needed one copy of the game to set up a race, and the chance to adjust the speed level of your car, hinting at the customisation elements that would later be introduced. There are a few quirky aspects too, such as buggy mode and squeaky voiced commentary, and *Galaga '88* also replaced *Galaxian* at the start of the game.

In the same year that *Rage Racer* and *Revolution* were released, a third and pretty peculiar *Ridge Racer* game also came out in Japan. Aimed specifically at children, and seemingly inspired by the buggy mode in *Ridge Racer Revolution*, *Pocket Racer* was yet another reworked version of the original arcade game that featured deformed vehicles shaped like Choro-Q toy cars and simplified steering especially catered towards making the game more accessible.

For the next game in the series, *Rage Racer*, Namco swapped out the inviting, colourful aesthetics for more shiny, burnished and realistic-looking visuals. In keeping with this new sense of professionalism, Namco introduced the first ever career mode into the series too, in which players earned credits through winning races to spend on purchasing new cars and upgrading existing ones. Encompassing five different classes with a secret one unlocked at the end of the game, the career mode was notable for giving players three chances to successfully finish a heat, with failure to place third or higher in three tries clearing you of all the trophies you had earned inside that attempt but still allowing you to keep whatever cash and cars you had accumulated up to that point.

This release was then followed up by *Ridge Racer Type 4* the following year, which continued down that same road. The final *Ridge Racer* game to appear on the PlayStation, *Type 4* kept the more realistic tone and look of *Rage Racer*, but was enhanced by featuring gouraud-shaded visuals and an

improved Grand Prix mode in which players got to pick a racing team and car manufacturer, and then competed in a series of races with their team, investing in new cars along the way.

Type 4 also had more vehicles than had been seen in any *Ridge Racer* before: an impressive 321, though made up of only 40 or so models. Unlocked fully by finishing every race in every possible combination of qualifying position, team and manufacturer, filling your garage with them all certainly took quite a bit of work, giving far more longevity to *Type 4* than previous instalments. Additionally, *Type 4* was the first in the series to offer split-screen multiplayer and to allow players to fully customise cars, and also broke tradition by introducing an alternative, more realistic, grip type of handling on top of the classic drift controls. Finally, packed with the game was a second disc that contained an enhanced version of the original

> **"Racing Evolution's silly story spirals into a tale of rivalry, subterfuge and girl power"**

Ridge Racer port. Dubbed *Ridge Racer Hi-Spec Demo* (or *Ridge Racer Turbo*), it was a truncated version of the game that ran at an impressive 60fps – twice the frame rate of the original – and featured enhanced visuals. It was a fantastic parting gift for PlayStation owners and made a brilliant sequel even more popular with fans.

From 2000 onwards, *Ridge Racer* received a large number of sequels, went portable, and even dipped its toe in realistic driving simulator waters. But before all that, it went multiformat.

***Ridge Racer 64* was not only the first *Ridge Racer* game not to appear on a Sony machine, but also the first game in the series not to be developed by Namco, with the development handled by NST, a first-party developer for Nintendo Of America.** *Ridge Racer 64* was basically a blend of *Ridge Racer* and *Ridge Racer Revolution*, as it repurposed the tracks in both games. It isn't a complete two-game facsimile, however, as it adds a brand new track, a new career mode and improved driving mechanics by offering a choice of different drift mode options, one of which allowed your car to perform 360-degree spins. Add in the N64's capacity to offer four-player single-screen multiplayer, and *Ridge Racer 64* certainly lived up to the impeccable standards of Namco's entries.

Around the time that development on *Ridge Racer 64* was under way at NST, Namco was busy getting to grips with the soon-to-be-released PlayStation 2, and once again produced a *Ridge Racer* game to coincide with the machine's March 2000 launch in Japan. Like the N64 game, *Ridge Racer V* also played things close to the first two PlayStation games. It saw a return to the uncomplicated arcade origins of the series, and the circuits harked back to the original game, featuring reworked versions of the Novice and Advanced courses in *Ridge Racer*. Given its clear arcade traits, it's logical that Namco would choose to release a coin-op version of the game, and so *Ridge Racer V: Arcade Battle*, currently the last ever *Ridge Racer* arcade game, was released around the same time.

Following *Ridge Racer V*, Namco then produced a *Ridge Racer* spin-off title designed to subtly test how the series would perform as a realistic driving simulator. *R: Racing Evolution*, which was released for the PS2 in 2003 and later ported to the Xbox and GameCube, ignored *Ridge Racer*'s arcade heritage by featuring intricate car customisation options, allowing players to alter myriad settings of each car, from body weight to wheels, and also incorporated a story into the racing. In the game you assume the role of an ambulance driver who, after impressing the head of a shady racing team by speeding an injured racer to the hospital, gets signed up to race for them. The story then gets even sillier, spiralling into a tale of racing rivalry, corporate subterfuge and girl power. It then gets a bit *Thelma & Louise*.

In 2004, the series first went portable with *Ridge Racer DS* and *Ridge Racer* for the PSP. The former was a faithful DS port of *Ridge Racer 64* that made use of the portable's touch-screen controls as a steering method, while the latter was something of a 'best of', featuring tracks from previous PlayStation entries, but, most notably, the City and Mountain stages from *Rave Racer*. It also added in new vehicles, and introduced nitro boosting. A sequel followed in 2006, which kept to the exact same formula, once again featuring enhanced, repurposed tracks from the series but this time adding a few from *Rage Racer*.

Between these two PSP games, though, *Ridge Racer 6* became a launch title for the Xbox 360. As well as online racing, the most notable thing the game added was the slightly more autonomous means of progression. The game's terribly named World Xplorer mode was a gradually unfurling career that allowed you to pick and choose the race you wished to enter, some of which featured differing race criteria such as no boosting, as you unlocked new cars and tracks along the way. An enhanced version of the game later appeared on the PlayStation 3 as *Ridge Racer 7*, featuring many of the same tracks but bringing in more vehicles as well as complete vehicle and bodywork customisation options. It also introduced a global ranking system that allowed players to post and compare their best lap times online. Oh, and it's officially the first ever 3D *Ridge Racer* game, as in 2010 Namco released a 3D update for it.

Namco went all aboard with a full 3D game in 2011 with the release of *Ridge Racer 3D*. It's an excellent little racer that once again returns the series to its early arcade and PlayStation roots. This tradition was followed in December when it released *Ridge Racer* for Playstation Vita. The game received lots of criticism at the time due to its tiny track and car selection and a focus on downloadable content. Despite its excellent handling, many critics (including us) felt it was a poor addition to the franchise. Little did we know that we'd still be playing it many years later.

It's sad then that the *Ridge Racer* story currently ends on something of a sour note. 2012's *Ridge Racer Unbounded* instantly turned off many gamers because its destruction-based gameplay meant it didn't feel like a proper *Ridge Racer* game. A selection of middling iOS games have also seen the series flounder and lost favour with fans. 2013's *Ridge Racer Slipstream* is currently the last game in the series. Hopefully, Namco will get the series back on track in the near future. *

>> NAMCO ON...

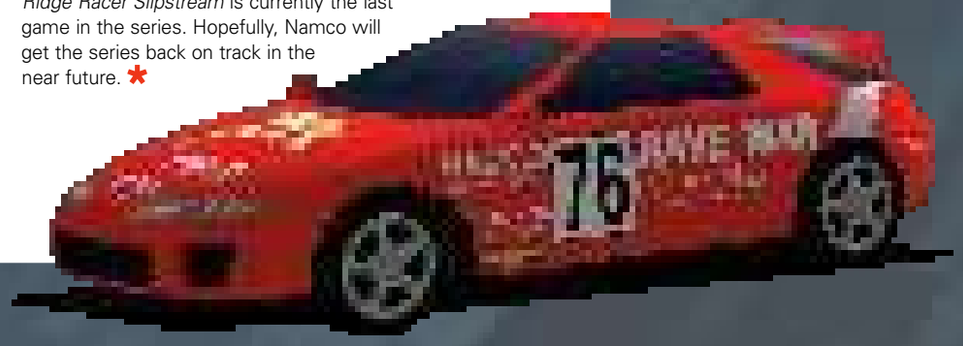
How important is the music to *Ridge Racer* games and how is it chosen?

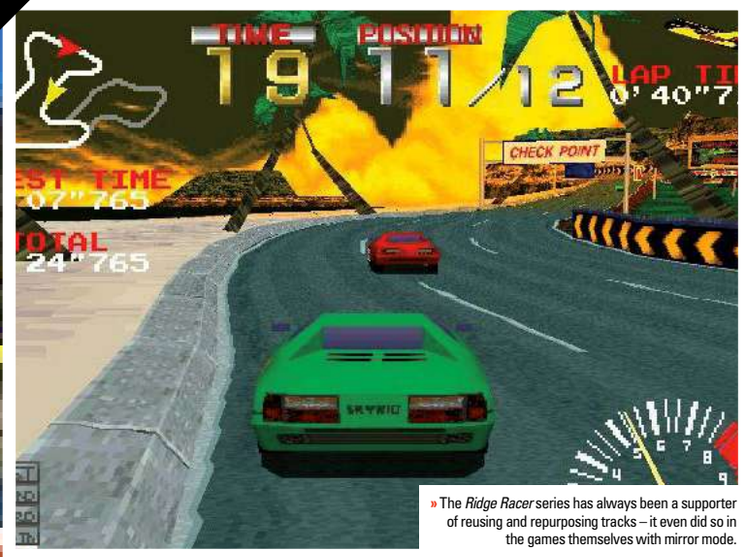
Hiroshi Okubo: To embody the unrealistic speed and tension of *Ridge Racer* and the use of the latest computer technology, the most suitable music is techno, which gives an impression of energy, the journey and speed. Historically, a lot of early club music was launched that way. Consequently, we inserted the most recent music styles, matching the concept of every title. We made a point of creating an atmosphere the player could be immersed into. In each and every title in the series, we chose a simple keyword or image that we gave to the artists creating the soundtrack. Then each of them would be free to create music filled with a sensation of speed linked to that keyword. Comparing them all, we took the personal touch of each composer and created a *Ridge Racer* sound rich in variety. This time I told them: 'I don't care about the style, but lock down the spirit.'

>> NAMCO ON...

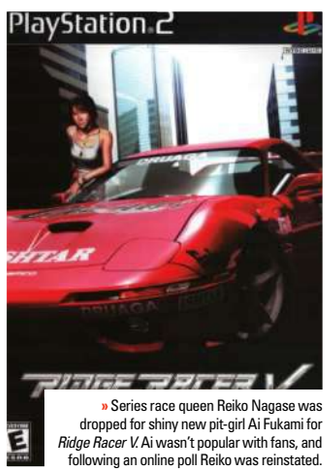
Why *R: Racing Evolution* never received any sequels.

Sakagami: The development of *R: Racing* was challenged by the following limitation: what are we going to do with yet another racing game from Namco when we already had *Ridge Racer*? So it became a game that offered a realistic driving experience, with real cars and real tracks. However, the players who were great supporters of *Ridge Racer* felt uncomfortable with this evolution. This is why we then reaffirmed the origins of what made *Ridge Racer* interesting and developed *Ridge Racer 6* instead of making a sequel to *R: Racing*.





» The *Ridge Racer* series has always been a supporter of reusing and repurposing tracks – it even did so in the games themselves with mirror mode.



» Series race queen Reiko Nagase was dropped for shiny new pit-girl Ai Fukami for *Ridge Racer V*. Ai wasn't popular with fans, and following an online poll Reiko was reinstated.

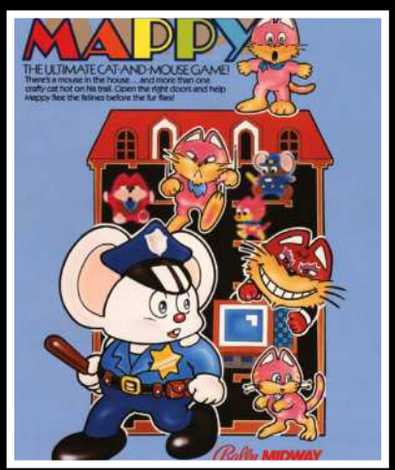
The games of Ridge Racer

We take a look at all of the Namco games that inspired the racing team names in the original Ridge Racer

RIDGE RACER (ARCADE)
Cyber Sled
Car #9 RT Cyber Sled
Another arcade game that saw early conversion to the PlayStation, *Cyber Sled* was a futuristic vehicular combat game – essentially a polygonal take on games such as *Tank* and *Battlezone* – in which players battled against either computer or human enemies using weaponised hover tanks.

RIDGE RACER (PLAYSTATION)
Solvalou
Car #2 RT Yellow Solvalou
Car #12 RT Blue Solvalou
Xevious fans will be well aware that Solvalou is the name of the ship you pilot in the game, and true fans will know that it is also the title of the third game in the series. Despite its first-person viewpoint and 3D visuals, *Solvalou* sticks surprisingly close to the original 1982 arcade game. The game wasn't a massive hit, though, and so is a rare cab to come by these days.

Mappy
Car #5 RT Blue Mappy
Car#15 RT Pink Mappy
One of Namco's quirkier arcade games, *Mappy* sees you assume the role of a police officer mouse as he tries to retrieve stolen objects that have been hidden around the mansion hideout of a gang of criminal cats. Very likely to have been a game entirely based on that famous idiom, 'a game of cat and mouse'.



Galaga
Car #6 Galaga RT Carrot
Car #16 Galaga RT Plid's
This very popular sequel to one of the most successful coin-ops ever made, *Galaxian*, is a fantastic and tense vertical shooter that improves on the original game in pretty much all areas. Retaining the same insect alien-blasting as before, *Galaga* adds a number of interesting ideas and features to the mix, such as bonus rounds.

Nebulasray
Car #8 Nebulasray
This little-known top-down shooter was notable for using a distinct ray-tracing technique to generate impressive and realistic-looking 3D frigates and enemy vehicles. Gorgeous to look at, fans of the shooter genre should certainly investigate the game – be warned, however, that it can be a pig to emulate.

Bosconian
Car #18 Bosconian
A game that many have heard of but few have actually played, this eight-way shooter sees you steering a ship and trying to destroy a series of fortified bases that look like watermelons while surviving a co-operative onslaught of alien enemies and space rocks. It's notable for being one of the first arcade games to feature continue screens.

Xevious
Car #7 Xevious Red
Car #17 Xevious Green
Xevious is one of the earliest ever examples of the vertical shooter. It was also famed for its lush, vibrant-looking graphics and clever enemy AI, which allowed the game to be challenging without the need to fill the screen with enemies. In fact, the game is such a classic that it received two mentions in *Ridge Racer*, via *Solvalou*.

BIO

Prior lightgun games had simply required the player to be quicker and more accurate than the enemy, but *Time Crisis* included a foot pedal which allowed the player to dive in and out of cover to reload – an incredibly simple idea which added a new layer of depth to the genre. However, the entire game took place against the clock, adding pressure and ensuring that players couldn't be too methodical in their approach to blasting the bad guys. *Time Crisis* became a massive hit in 1995, ensuring the release of a PlayStation conversion as well as a series of sequels.

Time Crisis

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION » **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO » **RELEASED:** 1995

The arrival of powerful 3D boards in the Nineties allowed arcade game designers to exercise their cinematic skills, thanks to the range of camera angles that were now easily available. However, many games only employed these techniques sparingly in attract modes – after all, directing cinematic action means taking control from the player. *Time Crisis* was already on rails due to being a lightgun game, so there was no such restriction – and Namco made the most of it.

One of the best examples is a particularly exciting scene late in Stage Two. The player's character, Richard Miller, is running through a corridor. He catches sight of himself reflected in a mirror at the end of the corridor, but that's not all he sees – an enemy guard rounds the corner shortly after him and lets off a shot, narrowly missing Miller and shattering the mirror directly in front of him. Miller then swings around, allowing the player to shoot the enemy. The scene lasts only a few seconds, but leaves a permanent impression on players and spectators alike. *

MORE CLASSIC TIME CRISIS MOMENTS

Explosive arrival

Continuing the cinematic theme, Richard Miller's arrival in the first stage is full of action. Sliding down a zip line into the enemy base, the carnage escalates quickly – as enemy troops scramble to deal with the intruding secret agent, a submarine in the background explodes and begins to sink as red warning lights illuminate the area. You don't spend long in this first area, but it makes a huge impact.

Secret agent

Finding secrets in arcade games is always satisfying, just for those moments when you get to impress a spectator who hasn't yet seen them. Early in Stage Two of *Time Crisis* you'll come across some girders. If you shoot the wrap that's holding them together a few times, they'll fall and send all the enemies fleeing, saving yourself valuable seconds in the race to rescue the President's daughter.

Backpedal

Time Crisis doesn't just throw gun-toting bad guys at you – the entire environment can be called into action as a hazard. A battle amidst a group of parked cars quickly takes a turn for the worse for our hero as a car comes sliding around the corner and begins to drive straight towards him, requiring quick release of the pedal in order to avoid eating bumper.

Unfriendly dialogue

Part of the charm of *Time Crisis* is that the dialogue is hilariously bad. Lines like "How could you? You killed my boss!" wouldn't make the script of even the cheapest of cheap B-movies. The character who best combines hammy voice acting and risible writing is Sherudo Garo, the second stage boss, who decides that you need to be 'entertained' – so he slings throwing knives at you. Obviously…

TOMB RAIDER

Few characters achieve iconic status, and Lara Croft ascended to become a superstar. But it takes a lot of hard work to stay relevant over two decades, as Nick Thorpe and Darran Jones learn from the people tasked with bringing Lara to life...

HALL OF HEROES

Everyone we spoke to about Lara Croft

STUART ATKINSON
ARTIST/ANIMATOR – CORE DESIGN

SHELLEY BLOND
VOICE ACTOR – LARA CROFT

WILL KERSLAKE
LEAD LIVE DESIGNER – CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

IAN LIVINGSTONE
CEO – EIDOS

MEAGAN MARIE
COMMUNITY MANAGER – CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

NATHAN MCCREE
COMPOSER – CORE DESIGN

MB DER

In the mid-Nineties, the videogames industry was short on icons, but there were plenty of characters to go around. You were hardly a developer if you didn't have your own 'hero' – and Core Design had just spun the kart racer *BC Racers* off from its *Chuck Rock* series. Save for the loose tie of ancient history, that game might not have much to do with *Tomb Raider* but for a single name: Toby Gard.

As a talented young designer, Toby Gard had moved on from *BC Racers* with the vision to create a project unlike anything else at the time, and something that would become truly iconic. *Tomb Raider* was to be a 3D action-adventure game, distinguished by its female protagonist. Initially conceived as a South American adventurer by the name of Laura Cruz, she would eventually become the British aristocrat Lara Croft, an athletic and independent adventurer with a penchant for collecting ancient artefacts. While Lara wasn't ▶

PETER CONNELLY
COMPOSER – CORE DESIGN

NOAH HUGHES
CREATIVE DIRECTOR – CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

ASH KAPRIELOV
OWNER – TOMB OF ASH

JAMES KENNY
ARTIST – CORE DESIGN

GAVIN RUMMERY
PROGRAMMER – CORE DESIGN

ANDY SANDHAM
LEVEL DESIGNER – CORE DESIGN

MURTI SCHOFIELD
WRITER – CORE DESIGN

HEATHER STEVENS
ARTIST/LEVEL DESIGNER – CORE DESIGN

BRINGING LARA TO LIFE

Shelley Blond on voicing Lara in the very first Tomb Raider game

How did you get the job of voicing Lara Croft?
I was asked to audition for the character after Eidos and Core had been searching for the right voice for quite a few months. I was sent a few sentences from the script, along with a very rough sketch of Lara, and I recorded them into a cassette recorder and sent it to Core. A few days later I was asked to take part in a conference call with a few people from Eidos and Core, including Nathan McCree, and after performing a few more audition lines was told I had the job. It was wonderful to get the role, knowing they had looked for so long and so hard.

How much information were you given about the character before performing the dialogue?
For the audition I was simply given the rough drawing and told she was a girl with a feel for adventure and 'spoke quite well'. I took that on board and read for the part as I felt she would sound. For the actual job, I was given more detail about her upbringing and background. I was asked to perform her voice in a very plain non-emotive manner and in a 'female Bond' type of way. I would have added more inflection, tone and emotion to my voice but they wanted to keep it how they felt it should sound, which was quite right. My job was to bring their character to life.

Why didn't you reprise the role in the sequels?
I was asked to reprise the role for the second game, as the chemistry worked, the game was so successful and reviews for the voice as well as the actual game were great. But by that time I was contracted for other companies and we couldn't make that work. I did give my permission for them to use all my sound bites from the first game for *Tomb Raider II* and *Tomb Raider III*... like the fighting, falling and 'yes' and 'no'. So I am still in the games. Judith Gibbons voiced the game but it's all Lara's original sound bites.

It's such an honour to be the original voice of such an iconic character. There are so many fans of the games, it has touched so many peoples' lives, had such a global impact and I am honestly thrilled to be part of it all.

» The infamous T-Rex encounter, as captured from a nice safe vantage point.

"A real buzz was building around Tomb Raider, but we were still prudent with our forecasts"
Ian Livingstone

▶ the first female protagonist in games, this was still a bold choice – few games included strong female leads. Dwelling on Lara Croft's qualities as a character, however, diminishes the fact that the choice to make a 3D action-adventure game was also bold. Not only was the project unlike anything else available at the time, the lead platform for the game was the Sega Saturn – a machine that would become well-known for its awkward and non-standard handling of 3D visuals.

"We were definitely trailblazing a lot of what we did on *Tomb Raider*," says Gavin Rummery, a programmer on the first two *Tomb Raider* games. "When Toby first described what he envisaged on my first day at Core, I wasn't sure it was possible because nothing like it existed." Of course, had that precedent existed, it wouldn't have been a big deal anyway.

"We didn't think about looking at repeating something that had been done before, so had never considered needing other games for reference," recalls Heather Stevens, a graphic artist and level designer on the first two games.

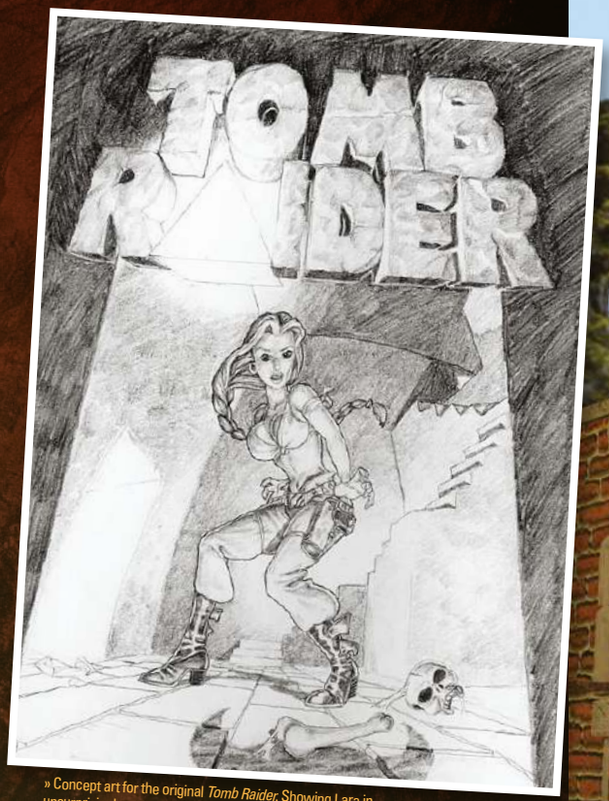
It was an enormous departure from what Core Design had done before, and the team struggled with it. "What appeared the greatest challenge was how on earth we would create the actual environments and get Lara to interact with them," Gavin recalls. "Heather was attempting to build them directly in 3D Studio which could only edit in wireframe mode, but neither Paul [Douglas, programmer] or I had a clue how we could get a character to interact with freeform environments given the processing constraints of the day."

"The breakthrough was the decision to build everything on a grid," continues Gavin. "To me this was the point *Tomb Raider* became feasible and everything seemed to fall into place. Toby was able to define Lara's moves, Paul could get the control working, and I was able to build a level editor that Neal [Boyd, artist] and Heather could use to build and test the environments far quickly than would've been possible using 3D Studio."

Getting the sound of the game right was important, and this was a task which fell to Nathan McCree – although given the amount of time he had to so, it might have felt rather more like it had fallen *on* him. "The first *Tomb Raider* was such a rush. I think I had about three weeks to compose the music. It was mostly a case of, write something and then figure out a way to use it later," he tells us. "What became apparent during the installation process was that the tunes worked best when placed in specific locations to describe a particular place or feeling at a specific moment in the game. And this gave birth to the idea of location-specific music."

Nathan wasn't the only one feeling the pressure, as the whole team was battling a very tight deadline. "It

» Lara's iconography can be attributed to her appeal for both male and female demographics. She is a hero for everyone.

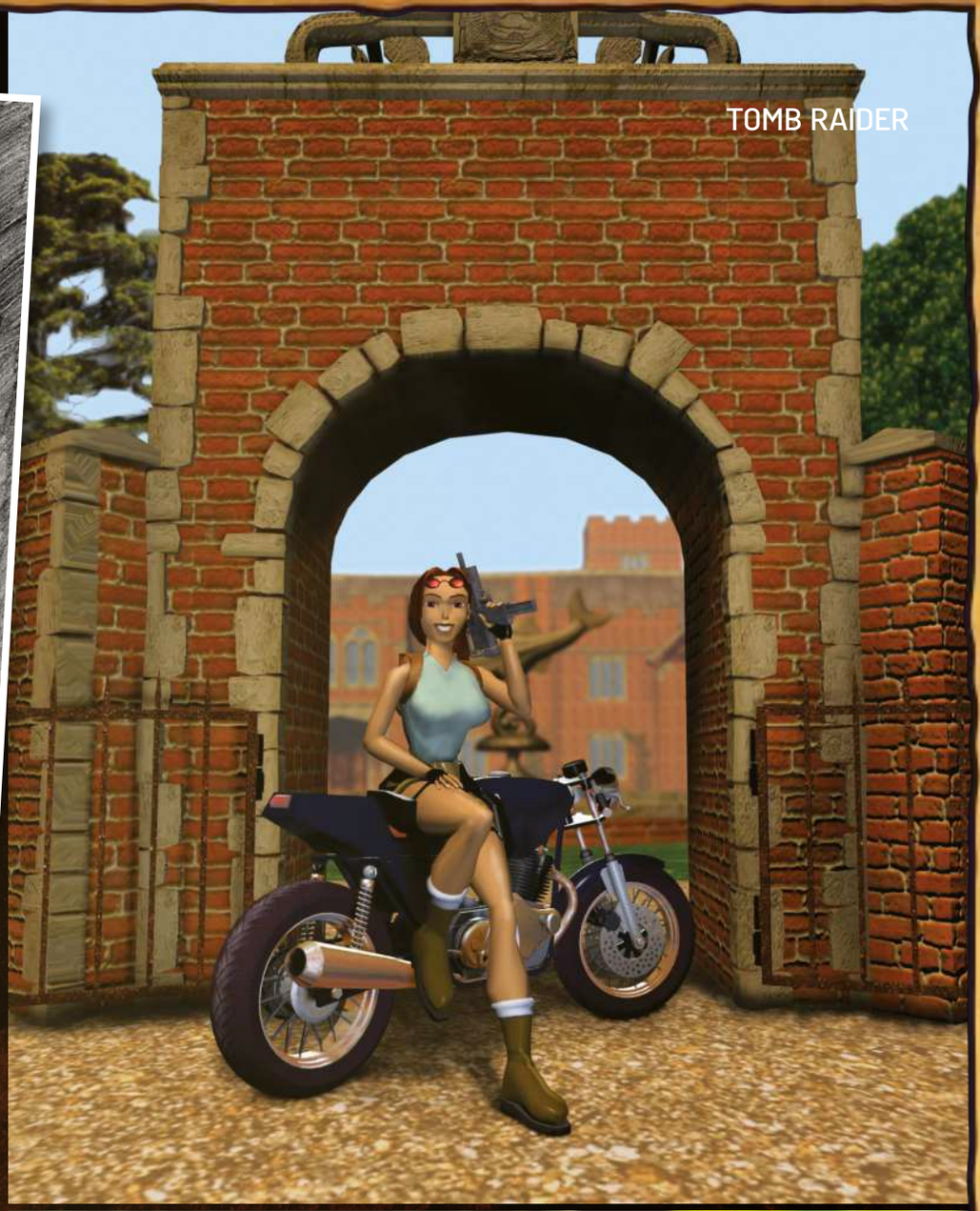


» Concept art for the original *Tomb Raider*. Showing Lara in, unsurprisingly, a tomb.

was tough developing *Tomb Raider* (long days etc.) but very rewarding," Heather confirms. This eventually led to extra staff being drafted in. "I was an animator and model builder working in the room next to the *Tomb Raider* team and also a good friend of Toby Gard," explains Stuart Atkinson, an artist who worked on the earlier *Tomb Raider* games. "He asked if I could help him out with enemy characters, being about four months from the deadline, the pressure was getting pretty serious and his workload was too much. So I jumped at the chance!"

Tomb Raider was released in October 1996 for the Saturn, followed by PlayStation and PC versions in November. It detailed Lara's quest to acquire the Scion Of Atlantis for the mysterious businesswoman Jacqueline Natla. The game was a critical success, and commercial success would follow. But though the team at Core Design was sitting on a hit, it didn't know it. "None of us knew it would be anything like the success it was," says Gavin. "We could tell it was getting favourably received, but it was only when we started seeing the actual sales figures that we realised just how big a success it was." Even the upper management wasn't aware that the game would be enormous. "The preview coverage had been very encouraging. A real buzz was building around *Tomb Raider*, but we were still prudent with our forecasts," says Ian Livingstone, then president and CEO of *Tomb Raider*'s publisher Eidos. "I recall that we put a number in the budget of 100,000 units being sold. Little did we know that the first *Tomb Raider* would go on to sell over seven million units!"

While there's no doubt that the game was a team effort, one man's influence is often cited as a key factor behind the game's success. "Thanks to a very obstinate Toby Gard and his vision of a strong female heroine in a computer game, we can now appreciate the unique Lara Croft," says Heather. "Undoubtedly Lara was a huge aspect in the success of the game and the marketability of the product. She was a character ▶



» Although concept art showed Lara's ponytail it wouldn't appear in-game until *Tomb Raider II*.

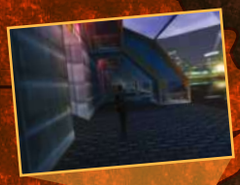
▶ that won the hearts of both male and female players. However the game was so much more than the character herself," she continues. "I think the key factor was Toby Gard," Stuart concurs. "It was his vision and he made sure everyone followed it through. He was also lucky with the team he ended up with, not only were they talented, they trusted and believed in him." However, that's not the only factor he credits. "And, of course, how amazing the first game was to play back in the day, it just blew me away."

Unfortunately, Toby Gard would not stick around for the success that followed. Creative differences drove a wedge between him and the management at Core Design, and he would leave the company without getting involved in *Tomb Raider II*, passing up enormous royalties in doing so. Most of the team remained and moved onto the sequel, which had to be ready in less than a year. Surely such a tight deadline was a pain? "Working on the sequel was a natural progression," Heather points out. "We had invested so much time and creativity into *Tomb Raider* that it would have been unthinkable to just walk away from it. It was action stations again for most of the team, and time to get our heads down again."

Externally, Lara Croft was already becoming a crossover star, a fact which brought the success of the first game home to the developers. "On the lead up to the release of *Tomb Raider II*, we had many more press and TV interviews, so things started to hit home for me," Nathan recalls. *The Face* featured a cover story on the character and her popularity. Rhona Mitra was gaining recognition as the 'real life' Lara Croft, and she was already collaborating with Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics on music to be released under Lara's name. This exposure built anticipation for *Tomb* ▶

AROUND THE WORLD

Then Tomb Raider games have taken place all over the world. How many of the following exotic locations do you remember?



NEVADA
TOMB RAIDER III

ENGLAND
TOMB RAIDER II, III, LEGEND, UNDERWORLD, ANNIVERSARY, RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

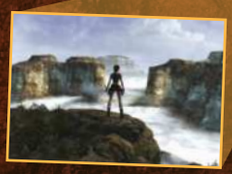
NEW YORK CITY
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

LOST ISLAND
TOMB RAIDER

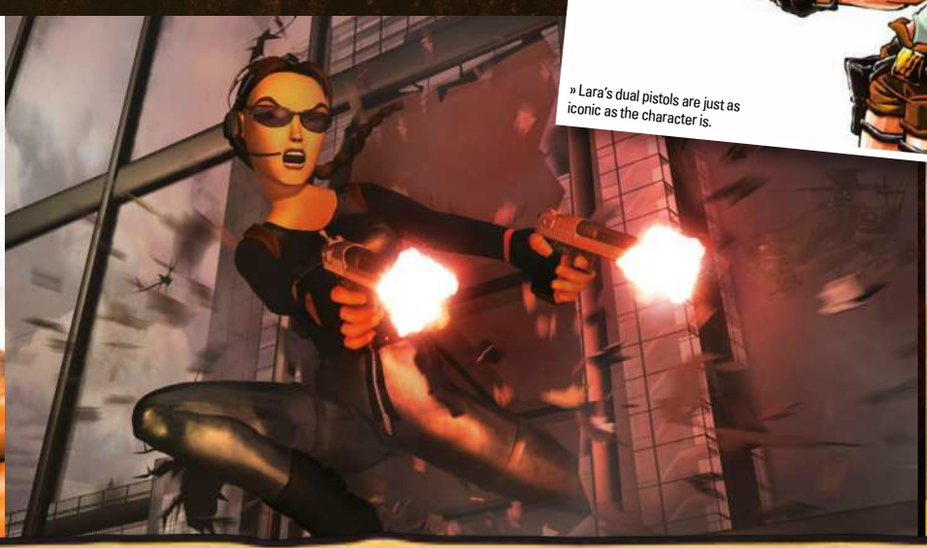
MEXICO
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD, SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER

PERU
TOMB RAIDER, TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND, SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER

BOLIVIA
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND



» Lara's dual pistols are just as iconic as the character is.



» Even the caverns were bigger in *Tomb Raider II*, thanks to graphical advances.

» Ash Kaprielov and several Core Design staff appeared at PLAY Expo's huge *Tomb Raider* celebration, which was organised by replayevents.com.

"I prototyped Lara riding a quad bike using only the animation editor"

Stuart Atkinson

» *Tomb Raider II* added in vehicles, something that Stuart Atkinson was particularly proud in implementing.

▶ *Raider II* to a fever pitch, and Sony took advantage by signing an exclusivity deal with Eidos, ensuring that the PlayStation was the only console to receive it.

Back at Core, the team was busy trying to top what had gone before – even if it meant improving on finer details. "I was pleased to get Lara's ponytail working," says Gavin. "It had been dropped from the original because it just didn't work properly with all the acrobatic moves – it was more like she had an electric eel attached to her head that had a life of its own. But on *TRII* I came up with a way to get it working and was really pleased how natural it looked. The physics were ultra-simple and a complete cheat, but it did the job."

Other additions were far more substantial. Improvements to the graphics engine allowed for wide open outdoor spaces that hadn't been possible in the original game, and Lara was no longer restricted to travelling on foot. "Introducing vehicles was my idea, I'm quite proud of that," says Stuart. "I prototyped Lara riding a quad bike using only the animation editor – I replaced her run animation and attached a quad bike to her bottom – the in-game result gave you a pretty good idea how well it would work."

On the audio front, Nathan was able to make improvements as he was more involved in the development process. "With *Tomb Raider II*, I had a little more development time (about two months) and although I wrote twice the number of tunes, there was a plan in my head about how it was going to piece together," the composer recalls. "I expanded on the themes, establishing new motifs, but mainly focusing on this location-specific idea that had been born in the first game. The implementation improved as I demanded control on how and when each tune would be triggered."

One of the game's most memorable moments was actually born of the tight deadline. "The game was supposed finish after the dragon battle, but it didn't feel like a satisfying conclusion, so we came up with the idea of having an epilogue," Gavin explains. "Due to time constraints the idea of reusing Croft Manor was chosen, with just a pitch battle of Lara defending her home. Then my favourite bit – the 'shower scene' where we got Lara to shoot the player – that was our response to the enquiries about nude cheats!"

Tomb Raider II was another critical and commercial success, surpassing the sales of the original. Plans were set into motion for *Tomb Raider III*, but this time most of the original team opted to move onto a new project. "Knowing you were leaving a big-seller along with the royalty cheques felt a bit of a silly move," Stuart recalls, "but our team wanted at least two years to develop *Tomb Raider III* – to really move it on, but the producers wanted it done in a year. For those who had done that for two consecutive years already it was just too much."

Luckily, the expansion of the team during *Tomb Raider II* provided new blood to carry the series forward. "I was finishing up creating some (unused) multiplayer levels for *Fighting Force* when I heard they needed FMV help on *Tomb Raider II*, so I offered up my services, as I was starting to see multiplayer arenas in my sleep," recalls Andy Sandham, who would follow up this involvement with level design from *Tomb Raider III* onwards. "My task on *Tomb Raider II* was to blow up the Great Wall Of China, if I remember. That was my introduction to the time-honoured *Tomb Raider* tradition of the willy-nilly decimation of historical sites and the laissez-faire gunning down of endangered species."

Another newcomer to the *Tomb Raider III* team was Peter Connelly, who would stick with the series for the rest of the Core Design era. Like many of the newcomers, he was excited to be on the team. "My first real experience [with the series] was playing *Tomb Raider II*," remembers the musician. "I had bought it for someone for Christmas and we were playing it extensively on Christmas Day evening. What I remember most about this was wishing I was working on such a game. Nine months later, I was working at Core Design." Though his contribution to the third game was small, Peter would become the series' main musician from the fourth game onwards.

Tomb Raider III started to branch out into new areas, and particularly more action-oriented gameplay. The addition of sprint button was useful for outrunning enemies, and new enemy AI allowed for the bad guys to call for reinforcements and shut off rooms, necessitating a stealthier approach. Meanwhile, dangerous terrain additions were made including quicksand and water with deadly currents. The other big change was the addition

» The rooftops of London are a dangerous place to be hanging around at night!

of a non-linear structure – while players started in India and finished in Antarctica, adventures in London, Nevada and a South Pacific island could be tackled in any order.

Upon its release in 1998, *Tomb Raider III* didn't fare as well as its predecessors, but remained an high-performing title all the same, shifting well over six million copies – meaning that another sequel was guaranteed for 1999. For Andy, that meant a new opportunity. "When Vicky (scriptwriter on *TRI-III*) jumped ship after *Tomb Raider III*, there was a gap to fill and I jumped into it, with a view to writing 'movie-style' *TR* games."

For story, we'd choose our levels first – for our team, the first and most important part of any *Tomb Raider* game was the 'buying books on ancient civilisations' and phase, to cement ideas that would result in a rough plot that I'd have to shape into something coherent," Andy continues. "I was reminded the other day that the next stage after this would basically be the whole team queuing up at the office scanner, coffee table history books in hand, waiting to digitise our next level texture."

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation introduced more of Lara Croft's history through a chapter showing a younger version of the protagonist on an early adventure with mentor/rival Werner Von Croy. Though it enjoyed a slightly more positive critical reception than its predecessor, *The Last Revelation* was perhaps the first real indicator that interest in the series was waning – it was the lowest sales tally for a *Tomb Raider* game so far despite the addition of the Dreamcast as a third platform. However, management was concerned about *The Last Revelation* for an entirely different reason.

As the fourth release in four years, it was inevitable that creative fatigue had set in during *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*. However, the way it was expressed was a shock to players around the world. "We all wanted to kill Lara," says Andy. "Looking at Lara's avatar all day every day for two years was about as much as some of us could take. Management were pretty hands off, so for two weeks, we hatched this plan to kill Lara, and followed it through to fruition." Indeed, the game ends with Lara entombed under a collapsed pyramid entrance, a dramatic and perhaps poetic end for the adventurer.

Of course, the team wasn't going to get away with killing the company's golden goose. "By 'fruition' I mean [Jeremy Heath-Smith, Core Design CEO] finding out we had killed her and it was too far gone to reverse it, and taking us into his office and shouting at us." Andy recalls. "We backtracked quickly, but not without paying penance by having to make another game set in all the ropey bits we had cut out of previous games, which became *Tomb Raider Chronicles*." In order to tie these pieces together, *Tomb Raider Chronicles* shook up ▶

» *The Last Revelation* is one of the most tomb-heavy games in the original quintet.

LARA'S BIGGEST FAN

We speak to Ash Kaprielov about his love of all things Tomb Raider

What was it about the *Tomb Raider* series that drew you in as a fan?

My teenage years were quite difficult, but *Tomb Raider* provided me an escape. The levels were so vast and challenging that it would take me weeks to finish a game, weeks where I could completely forget all my problems and explore ancient civilisations instead. When I first got an internet connection I started chatting with like-minded people and, since most of the forums were in English, it let me enhance my language skills. I met many of my best friends because of *Tomb Raider* and Lara gave me the courage to move to the UK on my own.

Tell us a little about your website, Tomb Of Ash

When I moved to the UK I decided to help my Russian colleagues at LaraCroft.ru, writing them a number of articles from various Expos. Then I interviewed Andy Sandham, a level designer and script writer for *Tomb Raider 3* to *Chronicles*. The interview was translated into Russian and I realised that I had nowhere to post the original English version of it. I uploaded it onto my personal Tumblr account, received some good feedback and decided to start my own website. I first ran it on my own, but then eventually brought my Croatian friend and fellow *Tomb Raider* fan Tina on to join me as a social media coordinator. [There is also] April and Tatiana, who produce various fan content. We actually helped Crystal Dynamics source interviewees for the *20 Years Of Tomb Raider Book*. Our latest achievement was the co-organising of the largest *Tomb Raider* 20th Anniversary celebration yet, hosted at PLAY Expo.

What's your favourite *Tomb Raider* moment?

My favourite moment happened on 8 October 2016 when Core Design took to the main stage at PLAY Expo. Their realisation that their work is still appreciated 20 years after the first game was out was incredible. I will never forget that day and the emotions that it stirred within me knowing that I helped make that day happen. I have been to many fan gatherings but the PLAY Expo weekend was probably the first time that I felt truly connected with the *Tomb Raider* fandom.

CREATING TOMB RAIDER

A retrospective interview with Toby Gard

Wasn't *Tomb Raider* originally a Saturn exclusive?

Core was in an exclusive deal with Saturn even when [*Tomb Raider*] came out. We were developing the Saturn and PlayStation versions simultaneously, but there was [a] time period that meant that Core wasn't able to bring it out on the PlayStation – it could only have been the Saturn. That was the exclusivity. Actually, it turned out better for PlayStation owners because there were a lot of bugs in the Saturn version. We found that out after it was released, and we managed to fix and tune up the PlayStation version a little bit before it came out, so it gave us a little bit of polish time..."

What challenges did you face making *Tomb Raider*?

It was all new to be honest with you, we were only a small team and none of us had done anything like it before. Every day was a new challenge. Obviously the coders there were superb to pull off *Tomb Raider* – both of the main programmers on the title had never even made a game before. It was pretty impressive.

Was Lara originally going to be a man?

When I very, very first pictured the game of *Tomb Raider*, it was from four drawings, and those four drawings were of a dude, an Indiana Jones-style dude, in a 3D world. When I began to write up the first design document, when I was working out exactly what the character design would be, there was a time when we were thinking about being able to choose from more than one. And so I designed a male and a female character. And then I realised that with the level of storytelling – I was going for a cinematic, movie-directed style – we would end up having to do double the amount of cinematic work, and that was somewhat more ambitious than we wanted to do. I'd already designed Lara and this dude, and I liked Lara more than I liked the dude, so she was the winner. That was that.

Did any films influence you?

There was a mixture of influences. One was the John Woo movies – I'd seen *Hard Boiled* and I wanted to get that in, I was so excited about that film – at the time it was just insane. I wanted to have that kind of dual-pistol insanity going on, with leaping and shooting and stuff. The other was *Æon Flux*. In one of the shorts, she's running around with Uzis, mowing down hundreds of people – and that was pretty exciting, I thought. So for me, it had to be that Lara was a dual-wielding action star, and that became an integral part of the whole costume.

What's the secret of *Tomb Raider*'s success?

Lots of different things, I suppose. It had a really unique character, it had some really memorable moments, it had some pretty clever level design, and it had a good solid platforming mechanic. It was based in the whole history scenario, which I felt was something that was very engaging. And it had a good story.

Interview extract taken from games™ issue 44

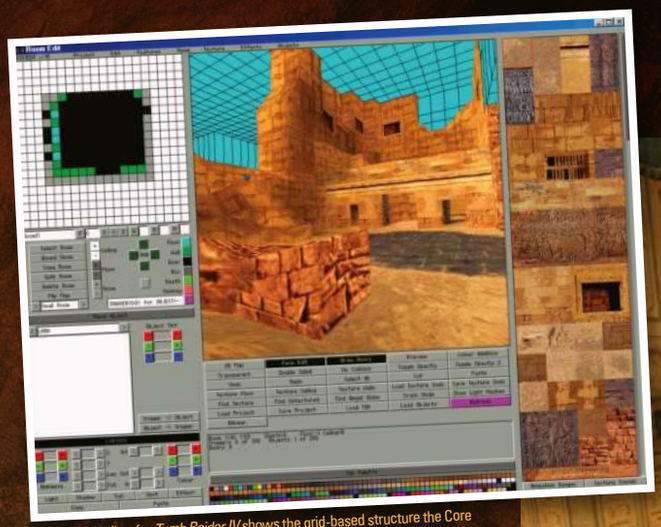
▶ the storytelling structure of the series – instead of a linear narrative focusing on a single adventure, the game was themed around Lara Croft's funeral. Gathered mourners recounted tales of her past adventures. By this point few additions were made to gameplay – Lara gained access to a grappling hook, as well as tightrope walking and the ability to swing from horizontal bars.

However, the *Tomb Raider* engine was beginning to feel very dated, as the yearly release schedule hadn't permitted significant alterations. What's more, the team that had seen fit to kill Lara Croft was still in charge and no happier with the situation. "That lack of enthusiasm showed in the final product," Andy notes with some regret. "The only person on the team that was still happy was Phil, the animator, who spent all day animating Lara being slaughtered in new novel traps and enemy attacks." When *Tomb Raider Chronicles* arrived in 2000, it was to the least enthusiastic critical response so far, and sales were drastically lower than those of *The Last Revelation* at just one and a half million copies. With a burnt-out team having pushed out five games in five years, it's fair to say that the original *Tomb Raider* model had been well and truly exhausted.

However, from the outside the series couldn't have seemed to be in a better position. Angelina Jolie had been tapped up to star as Lara Croft in a *Tomb Raider* movie, and there was a new hope for the games around the corner in the form of the PlayStation 2. With new technology, the team would have a chance to revamp the gameplay of the series. Stealth and hand-to-hand combat would play a big part in the new adventure, as would the new playable character, Kurtis Trent.

Along with the new technology came another set of new staff, with a hunger to work on such a huge project. "I was thrilled, daunted, overwhelmed (almost), delighted, panicked, hyper and exhilarated," recalls Murti Schofield, a writer who had joined Core from Psygnosis. "I was also determined to give this opportunity everything I could. This was a writer's dream. El Dorado. The Alchemists' stone. The Grail. The ketchup on the bun of life. So, how did I feel? Determined."

"My first experience of working on *Tomb Raider* was to be sat with a pencil and paper and to be instructed to simply draw out whatever ideas came into my head as long as they were Lara Croft-related," recalls concept artist James Kenny. "I had at that time zero experience of the game, film or television industries and had been recruited by Core Design straight from studying



» This level editor for *Tomb Raider IV* shows the grid-based structure the Core Design games were built on.

» Water areas played a large part in the *Tomb Raider* games, acting as a break from climbing.

animation in Ballyfermot Senior College in Dublin."

Initially, things seemed to be going well. "As with most games I've worked on over the years, there are usually delays and issues that contribute to stalling a release and, as *Angel Of Darkness* wasn't like the previous *Tomb Raider* games, i.e. they were released exactly one year apart, I wasn't that phased that things were dragging on," says Peter. Unfortunately, the combination of a large team, an over-ambitious design and a management structure ill-equipped to deal with the task quickly drove the project off the rails.

"The step up to the PlayStation 2 and the complexity that would engender was not properly envisioned by anyone at Core at that time," says James. "Also I think there was a desire to change the direction of the games in a narrative and gameplay sense and there was pressure coming from the developments in other gaming franchises." For Murti, the situation was extraordinary. "There was just so much that went wrong and the pressures were awful; I don't mean ordinary, standard industry pressures but the sense that the ship was slipping into the maelstrom and no one knew what to do. We knew things weren't going well. The game wasn't right. Deadlines kept breaking over our heads and still things were not right."

After many delays, *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* arrived in 2003 with much of the intended game design left on the cutting room floor. Despite selling two and a half million copies, it was given a critical kicking and is considered the lowest point in the series. With dissatisfaction rife amongst both fans and shareholders, Eidos took drastic action and removed *Tomb Raider* from Core Design. "As a board of directors, we did not take that decision lightly," explains Ian. "Core Design had done an incredible job in developing a new title year-on-year from 1996 to 2000. Then along came PS2 and with its new tech challenges which Core Design struggled with for too long. Instead of it being another hit in the series, *Angel Of Darkness* was not far short of a disaster when it came out in 2003. Sales were below expectation and development of *Tomb Raider* was moved to Crystal Dynamics. For a UK company, moving the development of its prized asset from Derby to California was a big decision to make but, as it turned out, absolutely the right one to make."

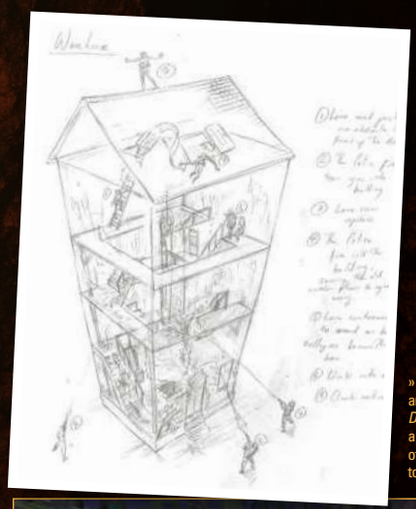
> **"There was just so much that went wrong and the pressures were awful"**
> Murti Schofield

» Ancient foes often wield powers that can barely be distinguished from magic.

History has vindicated the decision – under the care of Crystal Dynamics, the series has returned to form critically and commercially. However, from an outsider's perspective it seems like a harsh decision, especially as Core Design had only produced one truly bad *Tomb Raider* game. Surely the tens of millions sales it had generated prior entitled Core to another crack of the whip? "Many on the development team at Core had enough. Some were burned out and wanted to work on new games. It was definitely time for change," Ian responds. "But nobody should ever take away or diminish the contribution that Core Design made in not just creating *Tomb Raider*, but making it an iconic franchise."

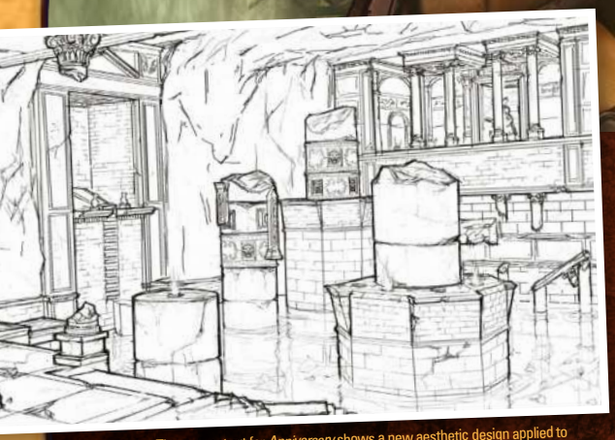
Murti agrees. "If Core had been given another chance would it have been different? Who knows," he ponders. "It would have required a restructuring of management practices and a shake-up – which seemed unlikely. And with the benefit of hindsight it *was* time for someone else to take Miss Croft's future in hand."

Over at Crystal Dynamics, the team had been working on the well-regarded *Legacy Of Kain* 3D ▶



» The concept art for *Angel Of Darkness* shows a stark absence of any actual tombs.

» Though planned as the first part of a trilogy, *Angel Of Darkness* marked the end of Core's *Tomb Raider* timeline.



» The concept art for *Anniversary* shows a new aesthetic design applied to the older ideas from Core Design.

> action-adventure games for some time, but getting the *Tomb Raider* job was a big shock. "For us, there was a sense of, 'Oh my gosh!' *Tomb Raider* was such a big franchise with so many fans – if we want to take something like that on, we'd have to do it so right, so it felt very much like a high-stakes proposition" recalls Noah Hughes, creative director at Crystal Dynamics. "But it came up more as an opportunity, with Eidos saying, 'Hey, would you guys be interested in working with this character?' From that perspective it was exciting, as it fit comfortably with our desire to create experiences that blended a lot of stuff – environmental exploration, combat and puzzle-solving."

In developing *Tomb Raider: Legend*, the first game of the Crystal Dynamics era, it was important for the team to establish which aspects of the existing games they wished to retain. "Lara's intellect and puzzle-solving, we wanted to keep both of those," Noah offers as an example. "Additionally we felt that traversal and exploration were important, these platforming elements – how could we provide a traversal toolset to make the world a jungle gym? And, of course, the sense that around each corner there might be a surprise, even the less noticeable corners could hold a secret. Also a combat system of sorts, the dual pistols are part of Lara's iconography, but focused on agility rather than a brute-force flavour of combat." There was one more significant element that the team homed in on, too. "We called it 'flair' at the time – things like the handstand, so you could express yourself as a character with moves that weren't critical to progression."

"The dual pistols are part of Lara's iconography, but focused on agility rather than brute force"

Noah Hughes

During the *Tomb Raider: Legend* era, Meagan Marie was just a fan of *Tomb Raider*, but today she is Crystal Dynamics' community manager for *Tomb Raider* and the author of the official history guide, *20 Years Of Tomb Raider*, giving a unique perspective on the development of the series. "I love Keeley Hawes [as Lara] especially, I love how quippy and sarcastic she was – she might be one of my favourite voice actresses," she notes. "I also enjoyed the fluidity in combat, the acrobatics – that's something that Crystal Dynamics pushed as a way to differentiate itself from Core and leave its mark on the franchise. Moving away from the grid-based movement and moving towards very fluid traversal, fluid combat, and that was something I remember being very impressed with."

In order to make sure the team got things right, Toby Gard was brought into the fold as a consultant. "It was great to have Toby because he was so intimate with her design, and it gave us the ability to be a bit more bold as we explored different options, but we had insight as to where we were losing that core DNA," Noah explains. "So from a character design perspective he was a great resource, and he became very involved in the story – I'm not sure if he has a writing credit, but I know he and Eric Lindstrom worked closely together. We were trying to bridge two canons, the Core games and the movies which had gained popularity, so it was another case where having Toby's insight into what was 'evolving' versus what was 'breaking' was important. Even to this day I'm grateful for having that overlap with Toby, because it gave us insight and the confidence to find our way without completely copying and pasting."

The results were an immediate vindication of the decision to go with Crystal Dynamics. The critical reception and sales of *Tomb Raider: Legend* were a marked improvement over the last couple of games, with four-and-a-half-million copies sold. That success ensured that two follow-up titles went into production, and Crystal Dynamics began to focus on the past, present and future of *Tomb Raider*. Although it didn't seem necessary at the time, Lara Croft's reinvention was going to become important.

That's something that the team at Crystal Dynamics recognised a lot earlier than most people realise," reveals Meagan. "After finishing Legend the team split, and a small team took *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* and another took *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, and started working on that, but there was also a small group that was two

» Lara's overall design was overhauled for the first Crystal Dynamics game.

people for a couple of years who sat and ideated the future of the franchise, Jason Botta and Tim Longo, before even entering preproduction. They knew that after *Underworld*, which would be considered the end of a trilogy, that something major needed to be done. They recognised after a while of exploration that an origin story made the most sense, and that letting the players see those moments where Lara was forged into the *Tomb Raider* would make her more relatable."

Of course, this reboot was many years away, and the two other projects would arrive sooner. The first of these was *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*. This was in competition with Core Design's final attempt to design a *Tomb Raider* game along a similar premise, though neither team necessarily knew that the other was in the running. Where Core had focused on the PSP, Crystal Dynamics had a multi-platform strategy that ultimately got the nod from the publisher. The resulting game was a loose remake of the original *Tomb Raider* in the new style. However, despite strong critical performance, good reviews didn't transfer into exceptional sales and it remains the series' commercial low point.

For the larger team, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* was Lara Croft's first step into another new generation, this team targeting the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 as lead platforms. "One of the things we did with *Underworld* was that we ended up pushing the technology," recalls Noah. "We had full ▶

» Cinematic scenes were just as important to the Crystal Dynamics games as Core Design's efforts.

BY THE NUMBERS

The sales and Metacritic scores from the main series

TOMB RAIDER 1996

SALES: **7.5** MILLION

SCORE: **90** %

TOMB RAIDER II 1997

SALES: **8** MILLION

SCORE: **83** %

TOMB RAIDER III 1998

SALES: **6.5** MILLION

SCORE: **78** %

TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION 1999

SALES: **5** MILLION

SCORE: **79** %

TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES 2000

SALES: **1.5** MILLION

SCORE: **70** %

TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS 2003

SALES: **2.5** MILLION

SCORE: **56** %

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND 2006

SALES: **4.5** MILLION

SCORE: **82** %

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY 2007

SALES: **1.3** MILLION

SCORE: **81** %

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD 2009

SALES: **2.6** MILLION

SCORE: **76** %

TOMB RAIDER 2013

SALES: **8.5** MILLION

SCORE: **86** %

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER 2015

SALES: **7** MILLION

SCORE: **87** %

SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER 2018

SALES: **4** MILLION (SO FAR)

SCORE: **75** %

» Here's a piece of early concept art taken from *Tomb Raider Underground*, the third game in the series Crystal Dynamics worked on.

▶ motion-capture actors rather than animation, which we hadn't done in the past, but we ended up with a similar moveset. But in some ways, the gameplay didn't move as far forward as the technology did." Indeed, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* did better upon its release in 2008 than *Anniversary* had managed, but it still didn't live up to the critical or commercial performance of *Tomb Raider: Legend*. Fortunately, the aforementioned foresight of the team meant that new plans had been laid for a reboot.

"We wanted to make sure we weren't falling into a 'myth of the week' pattern – we wanted to make sure our stories were character defining and not just adventures to go on," recalls Noah. "We had also gotten feedback that Lara as a character didn't feel fresh to people, so there was a sense that there could be audience fatigue or a lack of relevance to her as a character, so we took the goal of evolving gameplay and invigorating her character story, but also making sure that on top of all of that, we were recreating a relationship between the character and the audience."

For the first time, we saw Lara Croft not as an adventurer, but as a newcomer to exploration whose experiences would test her very will to survive. "Part of the unrelatability of Lara was that because she had infinite money and was so skilled, of course she was going to win. We felt that we had to place her in a situation where she had to earn her success, and isolate her from the support that she had, to make you believe that she could lose a battle." This led to the introduction of survival mechanics, as well as character development through an experience system.

The reboot, simply named *Tomb Raider*, managed to take cues from popular action-adventure games, like the *Uncharted* series, while retaining the feel of a 'Lara Croft' adventure. The approach worked well, as the game earned a fantastic reception – the reboot became the bestselling game in the series, with over eight-and-a-half million copies sold to date.

A follow-up was inevitable, and the pressure was on following the previous game's high sales. "It's always terrifying to have that amount of success, and we wanted to make sure it wasn't a fluke," Noah confides. "We looked at it as a challenge of how we figure out how to improve on that." *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* charts Lara Croft's growth in confidence following the events of the reboot. "In *Tomb Raider* you look at Lara's transition from being an explorer interested in the world to someone forced to survive," notes Will Kerslake, lead designer at Crystal Dynamics. "In *Rise* we continue that process, but we also see her choose to go on an adventure, so her character continues to evolve."

One of the things that the team was keenly aware of was the need to include more tombs for players to explore. "We did fill [the setting] with history," Noah

» Croft Manor is burning! What has caused Lara's home to end up in such a state?

» Combat now typically takes place using an over-the-shoulder perspective, as is common today.

LOVING LARA

We asked you which iteration of Lara Croft was your favourite

» Production art showing off the parachute sequence from Crystal Dynamics' 2013 *Tomb Raider* reboot.

recalls of the 2013 game, "but those layers were, for example, World War II, so they told stories a week before Lara got there, 50 years before Lara got there, and hundreds of years before she got there. But what we found was that because they weren't ancient places with ancient secrets, they weren't scratching that itch entirely." *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* initially launched on Xbox One, Xbox 360 and PC in 2015, and later launched on PlayStation 4, to a very positive critical reception that narrowly edges that of the 2013 reboot.

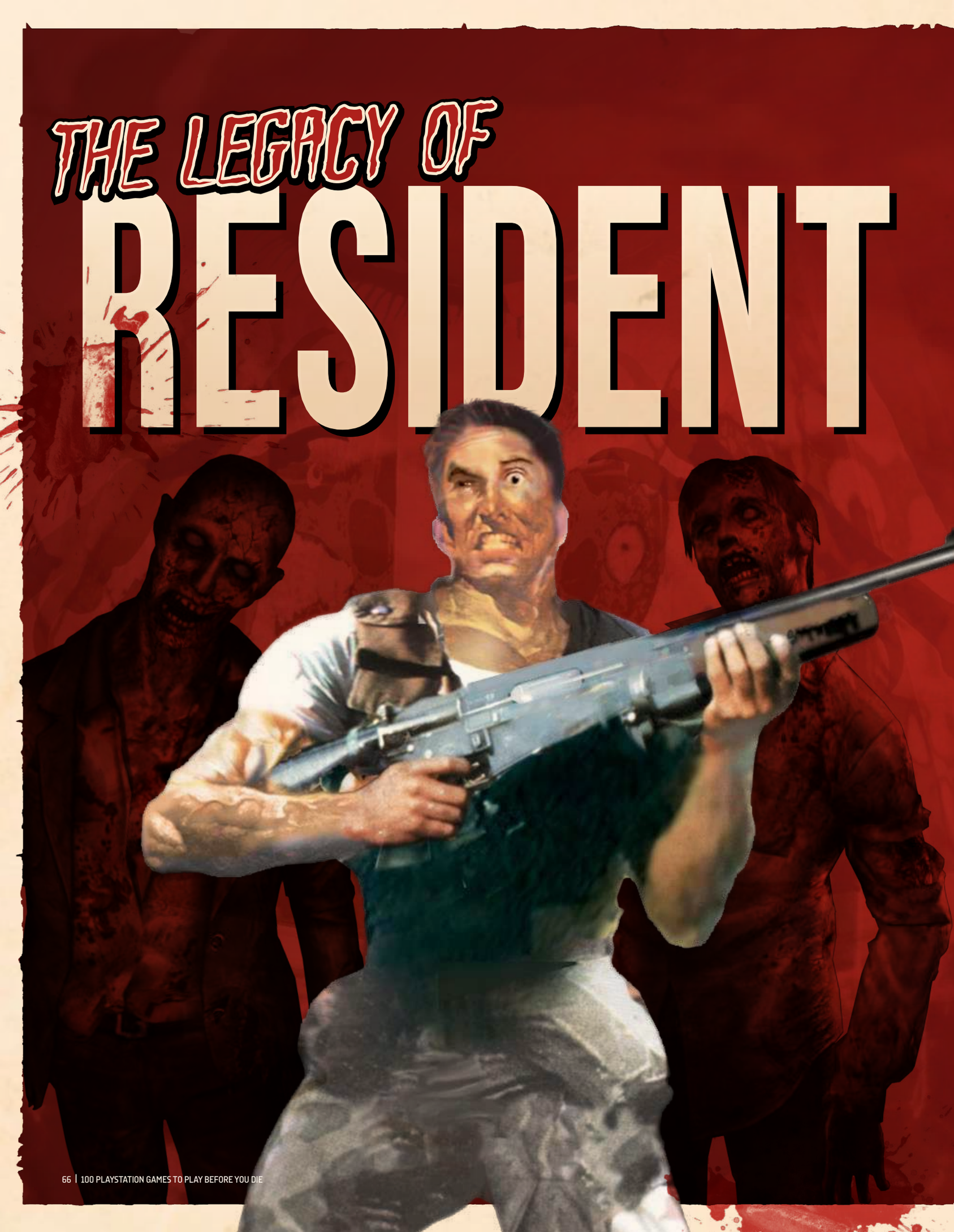
In many ways, Lara Croft's transformation into a survivalist is a fine way to represent *Tomb Raider*'s journey. From a starting point of fame and fortune, the series has had to adapt to survive against a backdrop of sweeping changes in game design and consumer tastes, as well as the occasional misfortune. Against all of that, the people behind *Tomb Raider* have reinvented it over the course of two decades to remain one of the world's most beloved brands, and Lara Croft stands alone as the icon representing that monumental effort.

Indeed, the future looks bright – the Crystal Dynamics team won't speak of any future plans just yet, but with audiences still discovering *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider*, an ongoing comic series and the latest movie reboot, it's fair to say that Lara Croft is perhaps just as popular as she ever was. "Lara has transcended gaming in a way that I think no other character has – because of the movies, because she was considered a virtual model for a while – so I think she does hold a unique place in gaming history that I don't know if any other character could compete with," concludes Meagan – and it's very hard to disagree with her. ✱

Special thanks to Ian Dickson, Ash Kaprielov, Alex Verrey and the organisers at replayevents.com for making this article possible.

» *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* is one of the first games to benefit from the additional power of the PS4 Pro.

THE LEGACY OF RESIDENT



EVIL

IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN PATIENT ZERO IN THE HORROR EPIDEMIC, BUT RESI SUCCESSFULLY MUTATED THE GENRE INTO THE TEMPLATE WE KNOW NOW. NICK THORPE SPEAKS TO HORROR DEVELOPERS TO ASSESS THE SCALE OF RESI'S SPREAD ACROSS THE GAMING WORLD...

MASTERS OF HORROR

The developers we spoke to...

MASACHIKA KAWATA
Producer, **Capcom**

CORY DAVIS
Cocreative director, **Tangentlemen**

THOMAS GRIP
Creative director, **Frictional Games**

WRIGHT BAGWELL
CEO, **Outpost Games**

SAM BARLOW
Independent videogame director

There's a famous saying which states that there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes. While both are inevitable, we're convinced that there's at least one certainty too few accounted for. You see, there's always a pedant out there ready to pop up when you least desire it, and we're about to lure them all out of hiding with the following statement: *Resident Evil* defined survival horror. "But **RG**," they cry, "there were horror games before *Resident Evil*! And really, didn't it just do a lot of what *Alone In The Dark* did?"

They key difference is in that little term 'survival horror' – nobody was using that before 1996, but it was the single descriptive phrase Capcom would return to. Upon loading *Resident Evil*, you'd be informed that, "You have once again entered the world of survival horror." Go back and take a look at the front cover of *Biohazard* (*Resident Evil*'s Japanese name) for the PlayStation, and the words 'survival horror' are right there on the cover. So the term survival horror is very much a *Resident Evil* invention – and within just a few years, the entire genre was being called by the name Capcom had given it. So while *Resident Evil* didn't invent survival horror, the series most definitely defined it and inspired a whole host of imitators.

Yet survival horror doesn't necessarily define *Resident Evil*. The series managed to reinvent itself so drastically with *Resident Evil 4* as to be considered more of an action game, and that game's influence has been primarily felt in this genre. So when we talk about the legacy of *Resident Evil* here, we're talking about the first age of its design – fixed camera angles, tank controls, limited inventory and all.

» Secondary protagonist Barry Burton is a beloved character, and emblematic of *Resident Evil*'s B-movie appeal.

» This ominous shot shows crows perched, waiting for you to fail at this room's puzzle.

As is commonly known today, *Resident Evil* was originally conceptualised by general producer Tokuro Fujiwara as a spiritual remake of *Sweet Home*, a Famicom RPG based on a Japanese horror film, to be directed by Shinji Mikami. That game had included many elements that would later make it into *Resident Evil* – the mansion setting, supernatural enemies, a heavy emphasis on puzzle solving and inventory management, the gradual revelation of the game's plot via diary entries and other notes, and even the opening door scene that serves to transition between rooms. Despite this, the original plans for *Resident Evil* didn't have a tremendous amount in common with the final game. Initially, the game could be played co-operatively, and the cast was comprised of cyborg protagonists, including the hulking Gelzer and diminutive Dewey as well as the eventual protagonists.

Realising that you wouldn't feel much of a sense of fear for cyborgs, especially given the original plan for a lone mastermind as the antagonist, writer Kenichi Iwao rewrote the game's scenario. What he came up with was the concept of a mansion in a remote forest, ▶

CORY DAVIS

Here They Lie's codirector on the impact and reach of Capcom's masterpiece

When did you first encounter the original *Resident Evil*, and what impression did it make?

Resident Evil came out when I was a sophomore in high school, and I remember it having a big impact on me. I was a huge fan of horror in general, but specifically of horror games like *Doom*, *Splatterhouse*, and *Castlevania*. *Resident Evil* felt different. Instead of a horror-themed carnival ride, the entire experience came together as a device for creating realistic tension and dread in unpredictable fight-or-flight scenarios. *Resident Evil* stuck with me when I wasn't playing it – this mechanism for creating fear… haunting me until I had the courage to jump back in for more.

What design choices heighten the feeling of dread in *Resident Evil*?

The apparent roughness in the design choices really made *Resident Evil* feel antagonistic to me as a player, and that was very attractive to me. The game mechanics themselves remind me of the way I feel in real life when presented with a frightening scenario. Even the limitations of the camera add to the heightened tension as you are constantly trying to get a better look at the threat that is coming at you.

What stands out as the most memorable moment from the first *Resident Evil* to you?

This is probably a cop out, but those damn zombie dogs got me the first time, and still get me to this day. The shocking way that they leap into the environment, and the horrifying whimper they make when you finally kill one… it all gives me the shivers.

What elements of *Resident Evil*'s design have you incorporated into your own horror games?

The oppressive feeling I felt in *Resident Evil* is something that I have pushed in some way, in nearly every game I've worked on. The scarcity of powerful weapons and ammunition can really allow you to walk the razor's edge of power fantasy, and anxiety-driven terror. Dangling a power-fantasy carrot just out of reach, and then requiring the tactical, skilled usage of scarce weaponry, ammunition, or other resources in high-tension situations is an extremely effective combo. I've always attempted to be as successful as *Resident Evil* was at creating a peaceful, unassuming lull in the combat, horror, and overall tension – just long enough to lower your defences and open you up for another round of terror.

» *Here They Lie* is a terrifying horror game that's available in VR, much like *Resident Evil VII*.

» Though primitive now, the gore and violence in *Resident Evil* was considered extreme in 1996.

"THE DESIGN OF RESIDENT EVIL IS A STRANGE BREW OF PANIC-INDUCING SURVIVAL MECHANICS"

» Unusual puzzles lead to odd situations like Chris trying, and failing, to read music.

▶ which has recently been the site of mysterious murders. The local police send in their elite S.T.A.R.S. (Special Tactics And Rescue Service) team to investigate, and after Bravo Team disappears without a trace, your job is to take control of an Alpha Team member (Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine) and find out what has happened. Taking refuge in the seemingly-abandoned mansion, the protagonists soon discover that it was secretly a scientific facility operated by the shadowy Umbrella Corporation, and is teeming with zombies and other mutated creatures.

The team's planning process might not seem particularly cohesive, and this is something that has always been questioned by fans. "The design of *Resident Evil* is a strange brew of panic-inducing survival mechanics," says Cory Davis, an accomplished designer of horror games whose work includes *F.E.A.R.*, *Condemned 2: Bloodshot* and VR gem *Here They Lie*. "There's always been a lot of debate around the 'clunkiness' of the movement, camera, shooting, and UI elements in the original design, and whether or not this was intentional."

At least some of it was definitely unplanned. The game was initially intended to be played from a first-person perspective – a feature which had numerous benefits such as a limited field of vision and intuitive movement. However, this was quickly scrapped due to the limited 3D power of the PlayStation. Instead, Capcom's designers adopted the use of polygonal characters over prerendered backdrops, a technique seen in the earlier PC title, *Alone In The Dark*. This enabled the team to use high quality models for the characters and enemies, but stuck them with a fixed perspective for each scene.

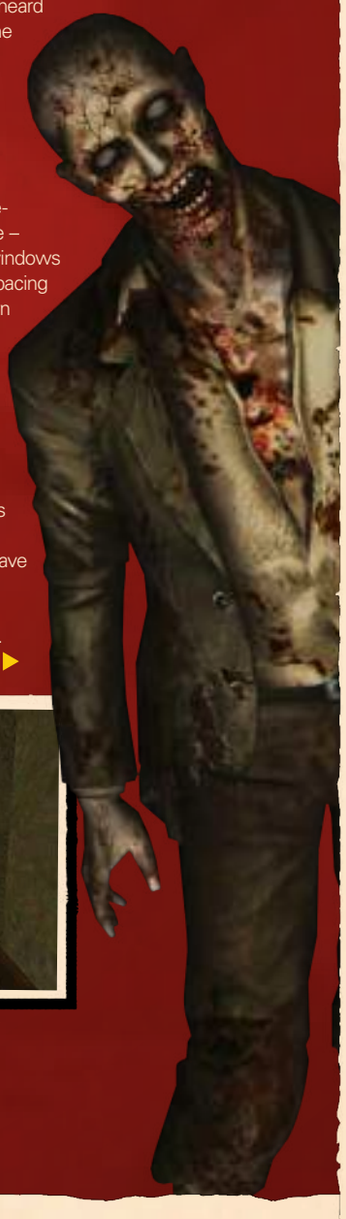
Ultimately, the camera was something that the team was able to turn to its advantage. "You have this sort of tunnel vision, and are constantly unsure what things that might lurk around," explains Thomas Grip, designer of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. "This means you start to imagine what dangers might be near and eventually you end up scaring yourself basically." Wright Bagwell, a veteran of the acclaimed *Dead Space* series, concurs: "When things get quiet and rooms feel mysteriously empty, people freak out – they expect something to happen, and keeping them in that state of tension is where the real magic of any horror game or film happens. Nothing that you

put on the screen is scarier than just letting peoples' imagination run wild."

Indeed, Capcom's design for the Spencer Mansion incorporated many short hallways and winding paths specifically to hide oncoming horrors from the player, but the moans of the zombies could often be heard way before you actually encountered them. The oppressive atmosphere proved effective in sustaining tension, but needed to be broken occasionally. "People are easily desensitised to scares and can easily recognise patterns," notes Wright. The *Resident Evil* team guarded against player complacency by mixing regular sections with plentiful enemies, lengthy puzzle-solving sections and the occasional jump scare – most notably, when dogs crash through the windows of a seemingly-empty corridor. This model of pacing is something that Wright has applied in his own survival horror work: "We spent a lot of time *removing* things from the game on *Dead Space 2* so that players didn't fatigue of combat, jump scares, and other surprises."

The effective use of restraint is what made *Resident Evil* so successful. Slightly awkward controls aside, the player is given the ability to run from zombies, or fight them. Healing items are relatively plentiful, and as long as you can make it to a room with a typewriter, you can save your game. But you're subject to a number of restrictions – you can't deal any damage while you're moving, and your ammunition is limited. While you might see multiple healing herbs ▶

» Camera angles were expertly chosen to avoid showing the player advantageous viewpoints.



» *Resident Evil* was never just about human zombies, as this mutant plant demonstrates well.

BY THE NUMBERS

We take a look at just how successful Resident Evil is

RESIDENT EVIL 1996
PLAYSTATION

SALES: **5.8** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 2 1998
PLAYSTATION

SALES: **5** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 3 NEMESIS 1999
PLAYSTATION

SALES: **3.5** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA 2000
PS2

SALES: **2.2** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE 2002
PS3, PS4

SALES: **2.7** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005
PS2

SALES: **5.9** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 5 2009
PS3

SALES: **7.1** MILLION

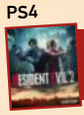
RESIDENT EVIL 6 2012
PS3

SALES: **6.6** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD 2017
PS4

SALES: **6** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 2 REMAKE 2019
PS4



SALES: **4.9** MILLION (SO FAR)

* Source: Capcom Investor Relations

» *Resident Evil 2* shifted the setting to the disaster-stricken streets of Raccoon City.

▶ in a room, your limited inventory means that you can rarely carry more than one, forcing you to leave others behind. Even your ability to save is limited by the need for Ink Ribbons. Ultimately, you're forced to eliminate only high-priority threats. "The way the game forces you to traverse the map and learn which spaces are safe or not allows you to really build up some suspense and dread," notes Sam Barlow, whose design and writing credits include *Silent Hill: Origins* and *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*. "You have to (frequently) backtrack through narrow corridors, where you know there's a good chance of you taking a hit from a zombie you left behind."

The use of zombies as a primary enemy proved to be a great fit for this gameplay template. They're slow enough to avoid, but resilient and dangerous in groups or tight spaces. "They're somewhat predictable and understandable… so it's easy to weigh the odds and feel them tip against you," notes Sam. "Zombies aren't about the primal dread of some horror, but tap into a rising panic that works well with videogame mechanics." For Thomas, the zombies also represent a smart technological choice. "Creatures like zombies are also very good for AI," he notes.

» *Resident Evil 3* kept the urban setting and ramped up the action, adding explosive barrels and better weapons.

> "SEEING IT FOR THE FIRST TIME, I THOUGHT HOW AMAZING AND POLISHED IT LOOKED"
>
> Masachika Kawata

"It makes sense for them to just stand around in a location staring into a wall, if they bump into objects as they try to pathfind towards the player it is just part of who they are and so on."

This what sets *Resident Evil*'s survival horror template apart from other horror-themed games. With more flexible controls, plentiful ammunition and an unlimited inventory, the game would be a power fantasy. However, *Resident Evil* forces the player to cope with strict limitations – you don't want or even try to eliminate every threat, but instead try to make smart use of the resources you have to make it out of your predicament alive.

I wasn't working on the series when the first game came out, but I was working on something else at the time and I distinctly remember the first time I ever saw *Resident Evil*," remembers Masachika Kawata, now a veteran of the series who is currently producer on *Resident Evil VII*. "The bug check QA period for my title and *Resident Evil* were aligned at the same time – and back in those days we didn't have staff that did QA specifically. The dev team just had to do all the bug-checking themselves," he explains. "When I was doing the bug-check on my game I saw the guy next to me was playing what I later knew was *Resident Evil*. Seeing it for the first time, I just thought how amazing and polished it looked, so even though it was before the game came out, that was my very first memory of the series."

Despite impressing their colleagues, the *Resident Evil* team wasn't convinced that the game would do well, with the game pencilled in for sales of around 200,000. If the game had any major weakness other than an unproven market for horror games, it was the

THE ORIGINS OF SURVIVAL HORROR

Capcom's game certainly refined the genre, but wasn't necessarily the first game to introduce the genre's key tropes...

SLOW MONSTERS
AS SEEN IN: HUNT THE WUMPUS
■ The use of slow, but dangerous, monsters is crucial in the genre as it gives you a chance to decide whether to combat them or avoid them. Needless to say, the latter is sometimes the best option...
AN UNSTOPPABLE FOE
AS SEEN IN: 3D MONSTER MAZE
■ A good survival horror game normally has an enemy that constantly follows and harasses you at every turn, until it inevitably defeats you or you're able to escape from it.
PUZZLE SOLVING
AS SEEN IN: HAUNTED HOUSE
■ You'll need to use your wits as well as your brawn in the average survival horror game and that will normally mean collecting various items and solving some particularly brain-testing puzzles.
LIMITED AMMO
AS SEEN IN: THE LAST OF US
■ A great survival horror game will typically limit your frantically searching and have you last bullet and then for every last bullet and then deciding whether you should actually use it or not.
MINI MANAGEMENT
AS SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL 4
■ Many survival horror games allow you to carry a finite number of items, meaning you'll need to carefully juggle your inventory. Some titles even make the stressful job into a game in itself.
FIXED CAMERA ANGLES
AS SEEN IN: ALONE IN THE DARK
■ Fixed camera angles have several uses. They not only allow for dramatic and cinematic-looking shots, but also they enable developers to sneakily hide monsters off the screen.
TANK-LIKE CONTROLS
AS SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL
■ Protagonists would often feature cumbersomely awkward controls that made them tougher to control. As a result, you could spend as much time combating the controls as you did the monsters.
SAFE ROOMS
AS SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL
■ Survival horror games are usually relentless, offering little respite for the player. Some games do offer small sanctuaries where you can save and heal up without fear of getting killed.

game's incorporation of human actors. The opening video sequence and overall voice acting carried a heavy B-movie flavour, with some toe-curling dialogue delivered with enough ham to stock the nation's deli counters twice over. It ultimately didn't matter – critical acclaim was widespread and the game went on to sell 2.75 million copies, making it the company's biggest hit since *Street Fighter II*. The game would achieve further success on the PC and Saturn, before being updated on PlayStation in a *Director's Cut* release and a further DualShock-enabled release that achieved over 2.3 million sales combined.

"So there weren't really many horror games back then, so this was maybe the very first game that you could say was truly scary," says Kawata, explaining the success of the game. "But it also combined these horror features with good, deep, entertaining gameplay and on top of that the game used the then cutting-edge capabilities of the PlayStation to the fullest. So it wasn't a title that had one gimmick and the other features were falling by the wayside – it really hit all those marks so successfully with horror, gameplay and technological prowess. That was such a great combination which made a perfect storm for capturing the minds of gamers back in 1996."

Resident Evil's sales were great enough that Capcom immediately moved into full production of a series, adding new variations on the original theme. *Resident Evil 2* attempted to inject a further sense of vulnerability into proceedings, casting you as a ▶

» The movie series, while based on the games, has carved a narrative for itself, setting itself apart from its source material.

HOUSE OF HORRORS

As one of the most iconic locations in videogames, the Spencer Mansion holds some truly memorable moments...

MEDICAL ROOM

■ This room is a safe one – in fact, it's so safe that this is where you'll meet Bravo Team survivor Rebecca Chambers, if you're playing as Chris. She's a key ally in your fight against the biological horrors you face in the mansion.

CEILING ROOM

■ You can grab a shotgun in the room next door to this one. However, you can't just pluck it off the wall – unless you replace it with a broken shotgun, this room's ceiling trap will activate. Don't become a Jill Sandwich...

L-SHAPED HALLWAY

■ There doesn't seem to be too much going on in this quiet corridor. But as you walk down it, ferocious hell hounds come crashing through the windows, eager for a bite of Redfield rump or Valentine thigh!

TEA ROOM

■ Here's where you first meet one of the mansion's inhabitants, who appears to be tending to one of your fallen comrades. Oh, never mind – he's feasting on the poor victim's innards. Get your weapon ready!

KEEPER'S BEDROOM

■ The groundskeeper used to live here, but now he's undead, and he will ambush you from the wardrobe as you read his diary! Of course, the real horror comes when you get to read his account of zombification. Itchy. Tasty.

ATTIC

■ We've seen some horrifying things in attics – water-damaged games, dead pigeons, you name it – but we've never come across a gigantic snake. This creature, known as Yawn, serves as the first boss of the game.

DINING ROOM BALCONY

■ This balcony seems safe from below. When you actually arrive there, though, you'll find zombies ready and waiting for you. If you push the statue here onto the floor below, you'll find a blue gem that's crucial to solving a tiger statue puzzle!

BALCONY

■ Here's where you'll find the corpse of Bravo Team's Forest Speyer, pecked to death by crows. His discovery is just a grisly moment in the original game, but in every version since then, he'll revive as a zombie and attempt to attack you.

SAFE ROOM
REMEMBER TO BRING SOME WEED KILLER
PIANO ROOM
GROUND FLOOR
SAFE ROOM
LARGE GALLERY
MIRROR ROOM
DINING ROOM
GALLERY
MAIN HALL
WHO LET THE DOGS OUT@
I HOPE THIS ISN'T CHRIS' BLOOD
DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR! YOU'RE A FOOL IF YOU DARE!
TAXIDERMY ROOM
LIBRARY
SMALL LIBRARY
BEDROOM
FIRST FLOOR
ARMOUR ROOM
REMEMBER: EYE OF THE TIGER
MAIN HALL
ATTIC
SNAKES, WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES...

» Though dark, *Resident Evil's* remade visuals were astonishing – little polish was needed to put them on modern consoles.

▶ rookie cop (Leon Kennedy) or college student (Claire Redfield) in the virus-infested Raccoon City with no obvious support. Additionally, the game took place across two different scenarios and your actions in one could affect your play with the other character – for example, if Claire grabs the submachine gun in her A scenario, Leon won't be able to take it when he visits the same room in his B scenario. Despite a troubled production in which the whole project was restarted late in development, the game shifted 4.96 million copies when released in 1998, and is arguably the most beloved of the classic games.

By this point, *Resident Evil* had effectively popularised survival horror games and other developers were keen to jump on the bandwagon. Indeed, the dominance of *Resident Evil* "was hugely problematic for the development of the genre moving forward", according to Sam. Early efforts had their own style, but the market soon shifted towards outright clones – the 1998 Saturn game *Deep Fear* is effectively *Resident Evil* underwater, and *Countdown: Vampires* is *Resident Evil* but with (you guessed it) vampires. Of the earlier efforts, *Clock Tower* retains a cult appeal due to its 16-bit heritage and point-and-click gameplay, and Squaresoft's *Parasite Eve* successfully blended survival horror with action-RPG mechanics.

1999 proved to be the year in which competition within the genre really heated up. While the fully-3D Dreamcast game *Blue Stinger* wouldn't provide much to worry Capcom, Konami's PlayStation game *Silent Hill* was much more successful in adopting real-time 3D graphics. The psychological horror of the game was a marked departure from the B-movie themes of other games, *Resident Evil* included, and the game was well-received and successful, kicking off a long-running series. Capcom was also taking a bite out of its own market with another real-time 3D survival horror, *Dino Crisis*. The initial game stayed close to the *Resident Evil* formula but provided some terrifyingly quick enemies, allowing the protagonist more mobility to compensate. The game sold over 2 million copies and spawned a series of its own, though the sequels were more regular action games.

» *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* shifted the series to full-3D environments for the first time ever.

> "THERE WEREN'T MANY HORROR GAMES BACK THEN, SO THIS WAS MAYBE THE FIRST GAME THAT YOU COULD SAY WAS TRULY SCARY"
> Masachika Kawata

Capcom wasn't content to leave the market to pretenders, though, and developed the next two games in the *Resident Evil* series in tandem. The final entry in the original PlayStation trilogy was 1999's *Resident Evil 3*, featuring Jill Valentine's turn to escape from the doomed Raccoon City. This time, the twist was the addition of a smart and persistent enemy named Nemesis, which hunts you down over the course of the game. Capcom also tweaked the movement controls a little in order to better accommodate increased levels of action, adding a 180-degree turn move for quick escapes. Despite a shorter story and no option to choose between protagonists, the game was another critical and commercial success, shifting 3.5 million copies.

On the Dreamcast, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* teamed up Claire Redfield, her brother Chris and prisoner Steve Burnside in an attempt to escape from the Umbrella-controlled Rockfort Island. For the first time in the series, environments were rendered in real-time, allowing for some camera movement

» The 2002 remake of *Resident Evil* added new enemies, wrong-footing even series veterans.

(although this was still predetermined) and the addition of first-person firing for some weapons. Between its Dreamcast debut in 2000 and the PS2 conversion in 2001, the game sold over 2.5 million copies.

The last two classic *Resident Evil* adventures were released for the GameCube, the platform Capcom had already chosen for *Resident Evil 4*, as part of plans to consolidate the whole series onto a single platform. The first of these was a modern remake of the original *Resident Evil*, created because the team believed that the game's visuals and localisation had aged poorly. The results were stunning – as well as a visual upgrade, the game kept series veterans on their toes with areas that had been cut from the original game, as well as the introduction of the dangerous Crimson ▶

BACK TO BASICS

How Resident Evil VII looked to the franchise's past to reshape its future

MANSION OF MADNESS

■ The vast majority of *Resident Evil VII* takes place in an old plantation mansion, which belongs to the Baker family. It's extremely similar to the original Spencer Mansion, with lots of locked rooms to access via unique keys. It effortlessly captures the same white knuckle tension that gamers experienced in 1996.

SIMPLE, BUT EFFECTIVE PUZZLES

■ *Resident Evil VII* will test your brain as well as your reflexes as it features plenty of effective puzzles to solve as you make your way deeper into the mansion. A videotape being used to ingenious effect to show a hidden room in the building is just one example of the clever puzzles that lie in store for you in the final game.

EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

■ *Resident Evil* was just as much about exploring your surroundings as it was avoiding its denizens. Amazingly, Capcom has been able to maintain that balance for *Resident Evil VII* – enabling you to examine various objects in your inventory and vicinity. The scripted text does a good job of describing your creepy surroundings.

AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

■ The Nemesis was a truly unstoppable force of nature from Capcom's third *Resident Evil* game, which would turn up at inopportune moments and wreak havoc on the poor player. Capcom mirrors this in *Resident Evil VII*, but it's now members of the Baker family who continually show up to terrorise you.

▶ Head zombies that mutated from any regular zombies killed early in the game. Despite the high quality, sales of 1.35 million was a disappointment.

Resident Evil Zero was originally announced for the N64, but moved to the Gamecube due to development issues resulting from the older console's memory limitations. This prequel followed Rebecca Chambers of the original game and escaped convict Billy Coen as they attempted to survive an outbreak of T-Virus infected leeches unleashed by the creator of the virus, James Marcus. The game implemented a new "partner zapping" system, allowing the player to switch between the dual protagonists at will. *Resident Evil Zero* launched in 2003 and retained the amazing visual quality of the GameCube *Resident Evil* remake, but also achieved a similarly-disappointing 1.25 million sales due to the Nintendo platform's weak adoption and the general feeling that *Resident Evil Zero* was ultimately more of the same from the genre.

By this point, even series that predated *Resident Evil* had adopted its conventions – 2001's *Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare* and 2002's *Clock Tower 3* were now closer to Capcom's series than their own origins. Capcom was aware that the series was in need of revitalisation, if not the entire genre. Despite the ongoing success of *Resident Evil*, the company spared no effort to make sure that *Resident Evil 4* would achieve that, scrapping multiple attempts before hitting upon a radical revision of the formula that ditched the zombies and Raccoon City for a more action-oriented style of game set in rural Spain. The game was an enormous critical and commercial success, but one which moved far away from the original survival horror template. The game created a legacy all of its own, one which further *Resident Evil* sequels have followed.

> "THE RESIDENT EVIL GAMES WERE ARTFULLY-CONSTRUCTED PUZZLE BOXES"
>
> Sam Barlow

But while *Resident Evil* left survival horror behind, appetite for the genre remained. It fell to a different generation of developers to drive the genre forward, and each has had a different approach. For Sam, *Silent Hill* has differentiated itself through tone. "*Silent Hill* games are never about the mechanics, whereas the classic *Resident Evil* games were artfully-constructed puzzle boxes," he notes. "*Silent Hill* games are messy and should lack resolution – they should plant themselves in your head and never let go. Whereas a *Resident Evil* game is something you can solve and win. The characters in *Resident Evil* are ciphers and fantasy costumes, whereas the people in *Silent Hill* are real and it's their stories that are the point of the whole thing." Additionally, the team at Climax was deliberately trying to break the mould. "We tried – as best we could – to try and tear up the rule book with *Shattered Memories* and were, perhaps not explicitly, but at least implicitly trying to *not* incorporate elements from *Resident Evil*," Sam recalls. "It felt wrong that such a specific template had become the dominant form for horror games."

That motivation to move away from the norm also drove the *Dead Space* series. "Glen Schofield

» Who would have thought that a full bath would be hiding an ugly zombie? Stab it in the head before it can pull you in.

FEELING LIMITED

■ The limited ammo found in the earlier games meant that every shot counted. Fleeing over fighting was always recommended in most scenarios, and ensured you had a good chance of surviving encounters. We've been terrified to discover that ammo has, once again, become a precious commodity.

THRILLS AND SPILLS

■ The original *Resident Evil* was famed for its 'shit your pants' moments, whether it was getting scared from dogs jumping through windows or being terrorised by cantankerous crows. True to form, *Resident Evil VII* is offering similar jump scares, more so if you're brave (or silly) enough to play it in virtual reality.

JUGGLING INVENTORY

■ Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield were constantly juggling items in the first game due to their limited carrying capacities. A similar system is employed in *Resident Evil VII*, so don't assume you can simply walk around the Bakers' mansion and fill your boots with goodies. You'll just end up disappointed.

» *Resident Evil Zero* was good, but formulaic, highlighting the need for Capcom to rethink its own approach to horror.

» *Resident Evil Zero*'s train makes perfect sense as an infection site – lots of people and nowhere to run.

really wanted to prove that his team was capable of succeeding at doing something risky at a company that hated taking risks," Wright recalls. "The goal was to make a game that didn't have to root you in place when shooting to make combat elicit panic and fear, so I think that the game felt a bit more familiar to those who play shooters," he continues. "The team did an incredible job at that. There were sceptics that thought it couldn't be done, and it was one of those great moments when it felt so good to prove old assumptions wrong." Not only did *Dead Space* become one of the most highly-acclaimed horror games of the generation, it spawned successful sequels and spin-offs, making its own mark.

However, for a designer further removed from the influence of the original games, avoiding comparison with a titan of the genre is not so much of a concern. "While *RE* was really influential, I am not sure I see there being any issues with escaping its shadow. There are so many simple things that one can do to be different," Thomas asserts. "If you keep the things that drive the game at a holistic level, such as the mixture of action and puzzles, or how encounters are setup, I do not think that many people will feel it is too *Resident Evil*-like."

It's now Capcom that is looking back to the early *Resident Evil* era for inspiration. "It's hard to work on a series in Japan because there's so much expectation that builds up over time, but you also have these big turning points where you realise that you have to make a change in order to make the series continue," notes Kawata, who believes that *Resident Evil VII* will be one of those major turning points. "The big change from recent entries is definitely that we're taking it away from the action that was becoming prominent with the later games and re-establishing a focus on fear as a key concept of the game." Indeed, like some kind of biological mutation, *Resident Evil* is now feeding off the imitators it spawned – the first-person perspective that has become common in other horror games is now a key part of *Resident Evil VII*, as is VR technology.

Ultimately, the horror of *Resident Evil* and its successors comes down to you – it's your reaction that matters. "Horror works best when you can empathise with the characters. The key is that you have to relate to them, and they have to be experiencing resource constraints that make them feel out of control," says Wright. This is something that Kawata also believes, and has tried to convey in the latest *Resident Evil*. "Something that can obstruct the player's ability to feel fear for the characters [is] if they feel they can handle the situation, but now you are a ordinary person in an extraordinary situation and it's not a given that they're going to be able to get through this in one piece."

So remember: when you're in an eerie corridor where you're sure that something is lurking in the shadows, you're in desperate need of healing and you're stuck with only a practically useless knife to fight off enemies, it doesn't matter how you're viewing the action or whether you're fighting aliens, dinosaurs or even zombies. What matters is that you're scared – and *Resident Evil* provided decades of inspiration for just those sorts of scares. ✱

CR

BAND

Nintendo had Mario, Sega had Sonic, Namco had Pac-Man. As the dawn of the PlayStation era began to rise it was clear Sony needed its own mascot, and it found one in the unlikeliest of marsupials

» Crash bares a striking resemblance to *Looney Tunes*' Tasmanian Devil.

ASH BANDICOOT

If you stop and think about it, there's quite a large number of PlayStation icons from the PSone era. Lara Croft, Cloud Strife and even the colourful beanie of PaRappa will likely come to mind when you consider the marketing pieces of the time. But among the numerous new faces of this exciting, upstart of a console none were so prevalent as *Crash Bandicoot*, an immediately eye-catching character whose frantic behaviour and Nineties cool charm was practically imprinted on his skin in his various posters, CD booklets and in-store banners. All the other characters needed context to stand out, while Crash landed in the 32-bit generation perfectly. In many ways he was decrepit, of a 16-bit age where bipedal animals with extraordinary abilities was the norm. The PSone had already been moving the industry far beyond that, and here was Crash – yet one more platforming creature that should, by rights, have been left to fail like so many before him. But Crash actually epitomised everything about the PlayStation at the time; he had attitude, he was unique and his game helped to bring the platforming genre kicking and screaming into the 3D generation. Crash was to cutesy platformer mascots what the PSone was to the videogames industry: a middle-finger to the status quo.

Today, most know the creative minds behind the original *Crash Bandicoot*, Naughty Dog might be a powerhouse developer these days, but prior to its seminal PlayStation game it wasn't quite the significant name it is now. In fact, it's output prior to *Crash Bandicoot* had been insignificant at best, awful at worst. The developer was just two people at the time, close friends Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin. While the pair had worked on projects before, it was their 3DO title *Way Of The Warrior* that would turn Naughty Dog into the established name it would go on to become. "I'm sorry, those guys were lucky as shit," says David Siller, one of the key producers on *Crash Bandicoot*. "They had done some real so-so products – *Keef The Thief* and other stuff that they had done, some of it published at EA. They'd invested in their own 3DO development system and those two guys developed a game on the 3DO. We used to call it *White Trash Warriors*, but it was a fighting game like *Mortal Kombat* called *Way Of The Warrior*." David goes on to explain that 3DO had a booth at CES one year and, by chance, Naughty Dog would be placed right next to Universal Interactive Studios who was there showing off its first videogame, *Jurassic Park Interactive*.

"Apparently in the course of the three or four days [Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin got to know] Mark Cerny and Rob Biniaz who were running Universal Interactive and needed developers, so they struck a deal with these guys. They said, 'Look, we'll move the two of you lock, stock and barrel to Los Angeles and we'll give you ▶

» The opening stage of *Crash* might not be the toughest, but it certainly is memorable.

» Bonus stages were integral for 100 per cent completion in later games. In the original, they were just a bonus.

» Though it wasn't the first game to feature a chase, it did popularise that style of platforming gameplay.

MEET THE CAST

CRASH BANDICOOT

■ The eponymous hero, once an ordinary bandicoot before an experiment by Dr Neo Cortex gave him exceptional abilities and a lust for crate destruction. Originally named Willie The Wombat.

AKU AKU

■ A mysterious floating tribal mask and a penchant for the force of good. As a companion to Crash, he keeps him safe from danger and can even empower the bandicoot with invulnerability.

DR NEO CORTEX

■ This big-headed (literally) evil scientist is the central antagonist for Crash's adventures, often building nefarious contraptions as part of his experiments to create an army of mutant animal warriors.

N. BRIO

■ The original assistant to Dr Neo Cortex and a returning character throughout the series. N. Brio's crazed and insane remarks are a good suggestion of his mental state (note the loose screws in his head).

RIPPER ROO

■ The second boss encounter in the original *Crash Bandicoot*, and one of the more recognisable, too. The straightjacket highlights just how crazy he is, a side-effect of prolonged exposure to Cortex's Evolvo Ray.

» There were many *Mario Kart* clones at the time, but *CTR* stood out as a challenger to Nintendo's throne.

» There were a number of new features added into *Crash Bandicoot 2*

▶ offices at Universal.'" And with that, Naughty Dog was locked in: it was to produce a 3D platformer with the backing from Universal as part of a three-game deal.

With the deal in place it was time for Naughty Dog to get to work, and new hires were brought in to bulk out the team and get the project underway. David – who had been working at Sunsoft – was brought into Universal Interactive where he was to be a producer, overlooking the development of key titles. Immediately David was put to work with Naughty Dog, on a title that was then known as *Willie The Wombat*. "I was told that I would be the producer of those guys," recalls David. "There was a six-page story that had been typed up in a nice font, I think by Jason Rubin. And it told the story of Willie The Wombat, and it talked about how the game was going to play. It would be third-person, camera-behind-the-character, and there would also be some side view and it would transition from one to the other."

With Andy Gavin working hard on the technology of the game, Jason Rubin – alongside David Siller – would begin creating the characters, the setting and the story for *Willie The Wombat*. We're told of different milestones the team was given, the initial being where the technology side of the software is proven to be up and running. "But the next objective is first-playable," David states, "and what that really was as far as the contract meant was that they needed to have Willie The Wombat running around in some kind of environment." This particular milestone is common in games development, and gives the publisher an early sign of the game's progress and potential. "Well, they failed that milestone," says David, "and Mark Cerny came to me and he said, 'Look, I want you to now design levels and you come in and show them how the game needs to play.' So I did that. I designed the levels that ended up being at the end of the game."

With the game now up to scratch and Universal's milestone met, David Siller, Mark Cerny and Rob Biniaz – founding president of UIS – went to show the game to Sony, a meeting that proved to be a huge success for the trio. "We took the prototype to get concept approval and Bernie Stolar saw it. The man is brilliant, he saw it right away – called people into the little conference room to get them to look at it, and he had his assistant go and get paperwork that he would sign immediately." *Willie The Wombat*, it would seem, was set to be an early PlayStation title. Except, by that point, this acrobatic mammal had already encountered a name change.

COCO BANDICOOT

■ Originally appearing in *Crash Bandicoot 2*, Coco is Crash's sister. The complete opposite to her brother, she's a level-headed whizz-kid with a computer and fond of riding jet skis and tigers.

UKA UKA

■ The Yin to Aku Aku's Yang, this mask represents the forces of evil and is the driving force for many of Cortex's bumbling plans. His eternal battle with Aku Aku is the foundation for *Crash Bash*'s minigames.

N. GIN

■ If the pun here wasn't enough, then the working engine attached to this scientist's is in fact from an experiment gone wrong. He managed to stabilise it as a life support machine, but it cost him his sanity.

TINY TIGER

■ Irony clearly wasn't lost on Cortex when he named this minion. Supposedly the first of Cortex's experiments in genetic mutation, Tiny is a significant boss character throughout the series.

"Mark Cerny came to me and he said, 'Look, I want you to design levels and you come in and show them how the game needs to play'"

David Siller

But what happened to turn the name from *Willie The Wombat* to the more marketable, more catchy, more 'PlayStation' name of *Crash Bandicoot*? "*Willie The Wombat* was what Jason and Andy loved," David says. "They wanted that name. Trademark searches were done by Universal to try and trademark *Willie The Wombat*." What they found was a trademark by Hudson for its action-RPG released in Japan on the Sega Saturn also named *Willie The Wombat*. Though the game rose to little prominence, it was enough to dissuade Universal from running with that name. "We had everyone in this huge room at Universal and we put a list together," says David. "We said we have to have another name, we have to have it now." During this meeting many names were thrown about until someone suggested Crash Bandicoot. The name stuck and the name was changed; *Crash Bandicoot* was born.

It's interesting to consider that, without the forceful hand of copyright law holding the original name back, *Crash Bandicoot* could've suffered a different fate. *Willie The Wombat* sounded ancient, the sort of title you'd see on the front of a cartridge, not on the CDs of the then-modern-feeling PSone. Even now, it's easy to see the importance of that name change, even if the name alone had no effect on the punkish attitude we've come to love Crash for. *Crash Bandicoot* was released in September 1996, almost a year to the day since the launch of the PlayStation itself. And, as it would turn out, it was an instant success for all involved.

Since Universal had signed Naughty Dog up for a three-game deal it was clear what the next ▶

CRASH BY NUMBERS

40.38 MILLION
Copies of Crash games sold

6,344
Crates in the original trilogy

52
Characters featuring across the series

18
Different games released since 1996

20:26
Fastest completion time of Crash Bandicoot: Warped's Time Trial stages

16
Different dangers Crash has had to run from, including a dinosaur, sharks and a tsunami

AS SEEN IN...

The wily bandicoot has spun his way off into other games, let's take a look...

SPYRO THE DRAGON: THE ETERNAL NIGHT

■ Spyro and Crash share many similarities. Both are stars of platforming games, both began on PSone and both were designed by Charles Zembillas. It's no surprise, then, to see Crash cameo in the *Spyro* game *The Eternal Night*, where he can be spotted in the frozen waters of the Celestial Caves.

UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

■ This was perhaps the most unexpected cameo, with Naughty Dog paying homage to the famed character it created in its epic *Uncharted* adventure. It was done in such a classy way, too, introduced with little fanfare as Nathan Drake teases his wife Elena as he tries to beat her score on the "TV game thingy".

SKYLANDERS: IMAGINATORS

■ Rumours and speculation of a new *Crash* game have been popping up for years. One example came via a photo of *Skylanders* developer Vicarious Visions where a poster of a redesigned Crash was spotted in the background. Well, as it turns out, this developer is including the bandicoot in the upcoming *Skylanders* game, *Imaginators*.

TY THE TASMINIAN TIGER

■ While not a cameo in another game, Crash Bandicoot was used – alongside Spyro and Sonic – in an advert for *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*. In the advert, the three stars are seen in a hospital battered, bandaged and sporting boomerangs lodged into their bodies. It was a result of aggressive marketing from EA, of course.

» *Nitro Kart* was at least a very good-looking game, but that's really all it was. It was a modern version of *Crash Team Racing*, and that was it.

game was to be, and so work on *Crash Bandicoot 2* began almost immediately. Though David would leave Universal and go on to work at Capcom, many of his earlier gameplay designs and sketches would come to be used in the *Crash* sequel. "Well, I left a lot of design stuff that was revamped," says David, detailing boss encounters in particular that they couldn't include in the original game. He had even previously created design specs on new elements for *Aero The Acro-Bat 3D* – a game series that David had worked on and brought the rights over to Universal with him – and many of these were used in Naughty Dog and Insomniac's games. "Mark Cerny had that copied and circled to both Naughty Dog and Insomniac to see where they might be influenced or wean ideas off of it since I was leaving it and *Aero* was going with me. They took whatever ideas they could."

With the popularity and success of *Crash Bandicoot* secured, Universal set about making sure this was a title worth holding on to. It increased the budget to $2 million dollars to bring on talented programmers and additional artists. Before long, Evan Wells – now copresident of Naughty Dog – would be brought into the team. The two sequels released within a year of each other, with *Cortex Strikes Back* releasing in October 1997 and the third game developed by Naughty Dog releasing in November 1998. In both cases, the increased manpower and budgets made for significant improvements. With *Cortex Strikes Back* a new Warp Room was added, providing a more non-linear format to the game's progression, while improvements to the graphics, the save system and variety of the levels all helped to improve on what was an already stellar first release. Then there was *Warped*, which introduced underwater levels, motorbike stages and made Coco Bandicoot a playable character. Both were well received, and established themselves as PlayStation classics.

» New gadgets were introduced into the franchise with *Wrath Of Cortex*, but they were mostly superficial.

Yet if we're complaining of the familiarity that these games came with, the next and final game in the series to be produced by Naughty Dog would offer something a little bit different. The fourth game began development at the same time as the third game, and utilised the new *Warped*'s motorbike levels as a template. That's because this new game was to be a racing game, utilising the colourful cast of characters for head-to-head vehicular carnage. "When it got to *Crash Team Racing* I would have done *Crash Team Off-road Racing*," explains David. "Instead of doing a derivative *Mario*-type game I would have had these suspension-like little vehicles and lots of rolling mountains that you could fly through the air on like an off-road vehicle does and if you land on someone you destroy them and score and so on." While David is correct – *CTR* was very much a clone of Nintendo's insanely-popular *Mario Kart* – it was a rare example among the copycats, it was a kart racer that stood out and could hold its own against Mario and friends. It was familiar to anyone lucky enough to have both the N64 and the PSone, with myriad weapons (many of which were copies of *Mario Kart*'s equivalent), tournaments and a battle mode. It did have its innovations, though: collecting the maximum number of Wumpa Fruit in a race would unlock an enhanced version of whichever weapon you picked up; and the time trial-mode included boxes with numbers on, that would freeze the clock and persuade the player to race down a specific route. Despite starting development at the same time as *Warped*, *Crash Team Racing* wouldn't be released on PSone until September 1999. The change in genre didn't affect the franchise's popularity; *CTR* went on to sell well over 5 million copies and received incredible praise from critics. Yet, although the Crash had already set himself in the halls of videogame fame, this would be the last time the franchise would be released with such confidence.

» While Coco was a playable character in *Crash 3*, she was restricted to the vehicular levels.

» The minigames available in *Crash Bash* are entertaining enough, but it had neither the quality of *Mario Party*

> **"We put a list together and we said we have to have another name, we have to have it now"**
>
> David Siller

Naughty Dog ended its affiliation with *Crash Bandicoot*, and as the series began the transition to PlayStation 2, it would struggle to find the same level of appreciation.

Before the PS2, however, Sony and Universal looked to squeeze as much as they could out of Crash and company, releasing *Crash Bash* on PSone in November 2000. This four-player party game was different, to say the least, pitting the characters of the franchise in arena battles. It was a set of minigames in an attempt to leech ideas from *Mario Party*, the first of which having been released two years prior on the N64. While Eurocom's effort on the title was commendable, it lacked the quality of similar titles while the limited popularity of the PSone's Multitap meant the game's potential only appealed to a small audience. It ended up passing many people by.

It's at this point where the history of *Crash Bandicoot* becomes messy. Having built a solid foundation, all the hard work of Universal and Naughty Dog would unravel. It's hard to point the finger in any one direction, but many will agree it all begins from one source. Universal Interactive Studios had been bought out by Seagrams at this point, but it was at the end of 2000 where the company switched hands again, this time to the ▶

SLAPSTICK DEATHS

Crash is known for losing his lives in many hilarious ways

BIFF!

■ The classic death animation. Crash spins around before tumbling down.

BOOM!

■ Looks like our hero got too close to some TNT, all that's left is his footwear and eyeballs.

BURN!

■ One charcoal bandicoot – it's what you'd expect from landing on some fire.

CRUSH!

■ Not outrunning the boulder in time, Crash experiences what it's like to be a piece of paper.

SPLASH!

■ Like most heroes of the time, Crash didn't graduate from swimming school.

SQUISH!

■ Similar to the boulder death, only this time Crash tries to save face by doing a sit-up.

CHOMP!

■ This dangerous plant like to exclusively eat early PSone mascots, back luck for Crash, eh?

ZAP!

■ Like most things, Crash doesn't like being electrocuted. Who would've thought?

YIKES!

■ Crash's nightmares of being caught with his pants down come true, thanks to this swordsman.

SMOOCH!

■ We'd die of embarrassment if we were to be kissed by a frog too, to be honest.

MAKING A MASCOT

All the ingredients that went into Crash's design

■ At first, *Crash* was jokingly named *Sonic's Ass Game* due to the camera being behind the character, the character was then named *Willie The Wombat*. This was the case throughout development until a licensing search revealed that a little-known action RPG made by Hudson and released only in Japan forced a name change.

■ Besides for a handful of, 'Woah's', Crash doesn't speak. This was intentional from the start, since Naughty Dog believed that videogame characters that were voiced at the time usually only added negatively to the experience and distracted from players identifying as the character.

■ Crash doesn't have a neck, a facet that Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin had gleaned from Warner Bros' Tasmanian Devil. Naughty Dog was inspired by Taz and his crazy, destructive attitude; the Tasmanian Devil also performs an aggressive whirlwind spin.

■ The colour for Crash's fur was decided first by listing popular mascot characters and their colours, then excluding those colours. Other earthy colours were discarded so he would be discernible in-game. Other colours – like red – were excluded due to how they interacted with old TVs. Orange was the only colour left.

■ Elements, such as Crash's gloves or the lighter patches of fur, were added to the in-game model to help the player distinguish which direction the character was facing at any given time. The gloves were changed for his Xbox 360 games into tribal tattoos.

■ Despite his three-quarter length jeans and Converse-style shoes being very much a part of the American punk/skateboarder scene during the Nineties and the original game's conception, this combination has actually stuck with the character throughout the decades – and it still works for him, too.

■ Crash was always planned to be a marsupial. The options at the time included bandicoot and potoroo. The opening for *Crash Bandicoot* pans into Dr Cortex's laboratory, if you look at the cages on the left of the lab you'll see other marsupials are being tested on.

» *Crash Of The Titans* focused more heavily on combat, rather than the classic platforming gameplay of old.

media powerhouse Vivendi. Almost immediately priorities changed, and with Naughty Dog busy developing *Jak And Daxter*, *Crash Bandicoot* would go on to be put in the hands of a number of developers in the hopes of creating something that could stick.

The first of the PS2 games would be *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex*, with new developer on the franchise, Traveller's Tales. It was to be a true open-world title and would incorporate puzzle elements. Universal, however, sought a new publishing partner and, in doing so, made an agreement with Konami to publish the game across multiple platforms, breaking its obligations with Sony. The result would be a separation between Sony, Mark Cerny – who had been designing the open-world gameplay – and Universal. While *Crash* was now open to a wider number of people, this decision had an unexpected knock-on effect. With Mark no longer on the project, Traveller's Tales was forced to return to a similar system used in the last traditional *Crash* game, *Warped*, with a system of individual stages rather than an open environment. This shift did not correspond to additional time to complete the game, and Traveller's Tales was given only 12 months to complete development. And it showed. Many ironically drew attention to the unchanged *Crash* formula, while others criticised load times and frustrating gameplay.

What followed was a barrage of titles, each failing to utilise the character in any significant way. Vicarious Visions was given control over its handheld outings, releasing *Crash Bandicoot: The Huge Adventure* in 2002, *N-Tranced* in 2003 and *Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Revenge* – a crossover with *Spyro The Dragon* – in 2004. Meanwhile, Traveller's Tales would return with *Twinsanity*, another platforming outing for the bandicoot that did little to mix things up, aside from pairing the hero and the villain (Dr Neo Cortex) together. Though it would be one of the better-received titles of the generation, it

» *Crash Tag Team Racing* continued to rip-off *Mario Kart*, this time it was *Double Dash*.

» It has a few quirks with its physics, but the recently released remaster of the first three games is pretty good fun.

» Crash and his nemesis, Dr Neo Cortex appear exclusively in the PlayStation 4 version of *Skylanders Imaginators*.

suffered in comparison to *Jak And Daxter*, which had already been dominating the genre at this point.

There was still *Crash Bandicoot*'s spinoff to consider, too; *Crash Team Racing* had proven so popular it was believed the gold vein could be mined some more. Vicarious Visions would be given control of development of the next kart racer that would become *Crash Nitro Kart* and release in 2003. It gave the classic kart gaming a PS2 overhaul, but offered very little new. Then there was *Crash Tag Team Racing* in 2005, developed by newcomer to the series Radical Entertainment. As you'd expect from the title, *CTTR* wasn't original, mimicking the very same two-characters-per-kart gimmick that *Mario Kart* had implemented with *Double Dash*. *Crash*'s kart series had always been a little *too* much of a clone, but this was taking it a bit far. This, combined with poor controls, led to *Tag Team Racing* getting very little praise.

"It was a good kart racer," says Joe McGinn, key designer on *CTTR*, before admitting that it wasn't a "great kart racer". "I think we took on a bit too much, the scope was too much because this was a 12-month project. [The publisher] liked the idea of integrating this platformer component as well, so it was not only a kart racer but there was this theme park where you were jumping around, collecting things, interacting with characters and stuff. It wasn't bad per se, but it did add a lot to it and it did take up a lot of our resources."

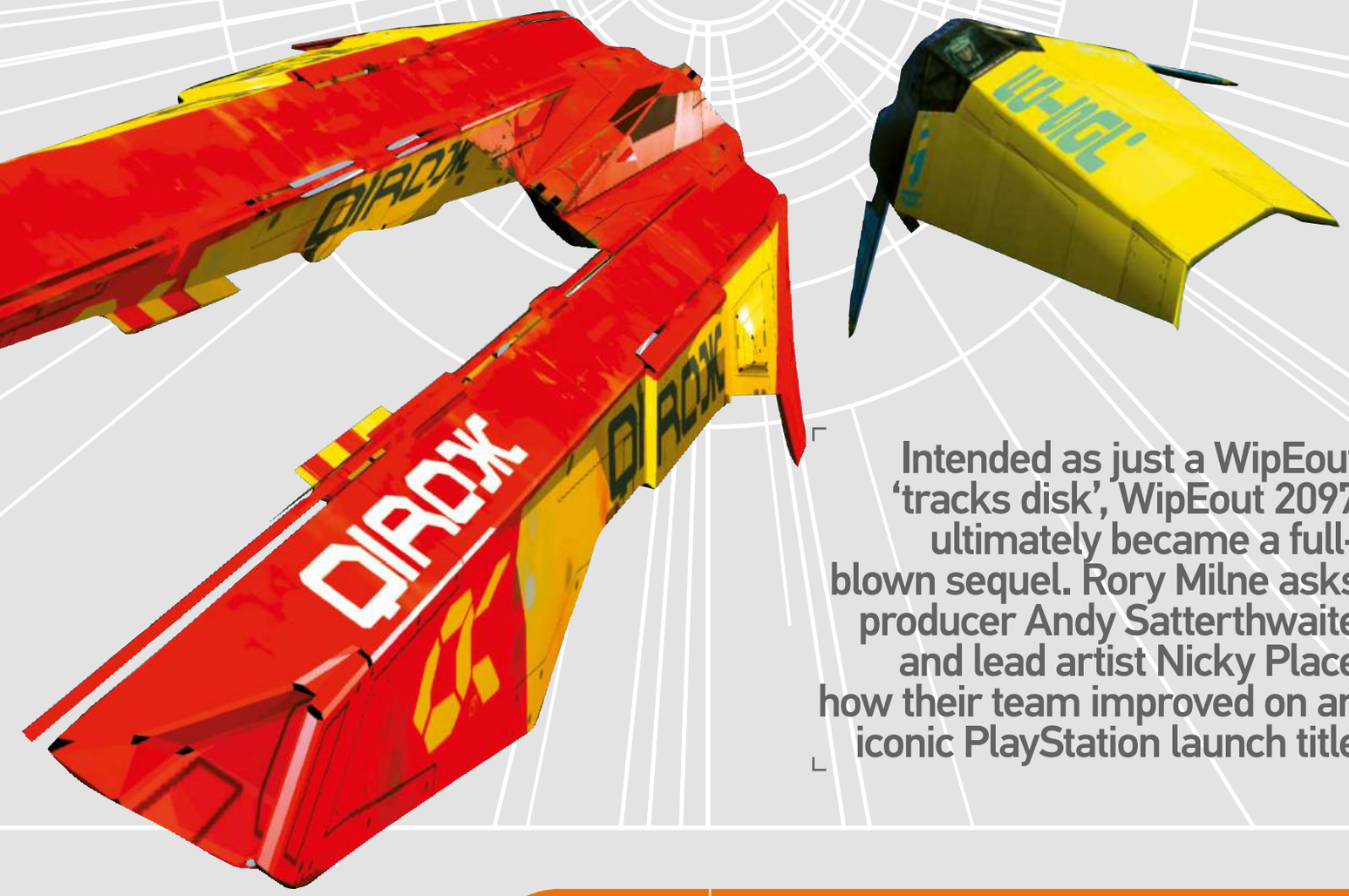
Up until this point there hadn't been much in the way of 'true' oddities for the franchise. The first and only would come from Dimps, a developer which had success making *Sonic Advance* titles for the GBA. Its game, *Crash Boom Bang!*, would be the second and final party game in the series, and launched on Nintendo DS. It flopped, and was criticised for everything from its controls to its skin-deep use of the characters.

But time had come for *Crash* to move over to the next console generation, and though *Crash Tag Team* Racing hadn't been well received, Radical Entertainment would be put to task on the next two platformers – and, as it would turn out, the last two core *Crash* games. *Crash Of The Titans* would launch in 2007, bringing a feature that allowed Crash to ride on the back of beasts. *Mind Over Mutant* would release a year later, this time becoming even more of an action game as Crash could now take control of mutants and use them to dodge, counter, and even choose between light and heavy attacks. Neither game sold well. The initial high of *Crash Bandicoot* had waned and there wasn't much call for a new *Crash* game. "At that time, it wasn't old enough to be retro," says Joe. "What I mean by that is that adult gamers weren't interested in *Crash*. I think if you made a *Crash* game now, you would have more of that. Adult gamers were all playing *GTA* or *Halo*, and so it was targeted kids."

There was one more significant change for the series though that has meant we've not seen another *Crash Bandicoot* game since 2010 (*Crash Nitro Kart 2*). Around the release of *Mind Over Mutant*, Vivendi merged with Activision and with the publisher now in charge, its ruling eye would fall on Crash. As fond as many would recall the PSone era, it was clear it was an underperforming series and Activision isn't a company to back products that won't appeal to a mainstream audience. *Crash* has, as a result, sat barely used for more than half a decade.

Until now, that is. Sony has recently teamed up with Activision to create *Crash Bandicoot N.Sane Trilogy*, which is an impressive remaster of the first three games that has been developed by Vicarious Visions. It's been incredibly well received by both the press and consumers, suggesting that there's still plenty of love for the crazy marsupial. Depending on the sales of the remaster, we may see Crash return properly. For once, it seems, the future of this iconic character could be the hands (or wallets) of gamers. ✱

WIPE



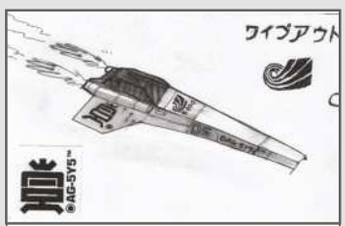
Intended as just a WipEout 'tracks disk', WipEout 2097 ultimately became a full-blown sequel. Rory Milne asks producer Andy Satterthwaite and lead artist Nicky Place how their team improved on an iconic PlayStation launch title

WIPEOUT 2097

The impact of the original *WipEout* on the general perception of gaming can't be understated. With *WipEout*'s release, seemingly overnight, gaming grew up and became cool, it had shook off its geeky image and went mainstream. What is perhaps less well-documented, however, is the effect that Psygnosis' title had on the young game developers of the time. And in Andy Satterthwaite's case, *WipEout* was an influence on the then-youthful Psygnosis coder even before its launch. In fact, Andy describes his first exposure to the stylish racer as something close to love at first sight. "I was employed as a junior coder at Psygnosis in 1994. At about the same time, the company was working on a game for the PlayStation – [then] called the PSX. This was all very 'secret project', but I'd sneak over to play early versions of *WipEout* whenever I could. I remember the first time I saw it, it was just a checkerboard track sweeping through the sky. I've had a love of *WipEout* ever since."

Although Andy was restricted to admiring rather than contributing to the PlayStation launch title, he did subsequently work on the DOS version of *WipEout*, but the experience caused the young programmer to reassess his career options. "*WipEout* [on] PC was just the title I was assigned to as a programmer – more coincidence than anything. However, at the time, Psygnosis didn't have producers on its internal titles, rather the lead programmer would take those responsibilities. Our lead coder wasn't necessarily the best at this – though he was a very good programmer – and I stepped in on a few occasions making decisions that were probably way above my pay grade. Somehow this must have been noticed by someone, because towards the end of that conversion I was approached by one of the senior producers in the studio suggesting that I apply for one of the new 'internal producer' roles they were hiring for. For me this was a complete no-brainer, it was quite apparent that my coding skills were not up to the standard of those around me, but if I could help organise something then that would be brilliant. During my interview, I begged and pleaded to be given the sequel to *WipEout* – if it happened. I apparently did a good line in begging and pleading."

Given hindsight, a *WipEout* sequel seems like an obvious title for Psygnosis to have commissioned. But at the time of Andy's interview it wasn't clear how successful the game would be, and even after his promotion, Andy found himself producing an expansion disk for *WipEout* rather than a follow-up. "I believe the success of the original *WipEout* came as a bit of a surprise to the Psygnosis/Sony executives. No sequel had been planned prior to its release. In addition, the majority of the original development team had left to form their own studio, and so the company was left with the need to produce a sequel with no time and no team. The directive was just to produce a 'tracks ▶



» A cool early sketch of the AG Systems ship. There are five teams in the game, with Piranha being secret.

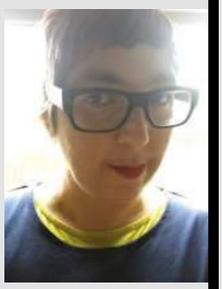
» Just visible on the North American Spilskinanke track is a waving cat, signifying luck.

© 1996 The copyright in the design is owned by Ian Anderson / The Designers Republic exclusively licensed to Psygnosis.

PIRHANA

WIPEOUT 2097 101

■ The sequel to the future racer *WipEout, 2097* improves and expands on every area of the original. In *2097*, scraping course edges causes slow-downs rather than full-stops, and weapons damage and destroy competitor ships. *2097* also has a smoother difficulty curve, more teams, courses and weapons, and more acts on its soundtrack.



»Nicky Place is a co-founder of the award-winning graphic design agency, Build.

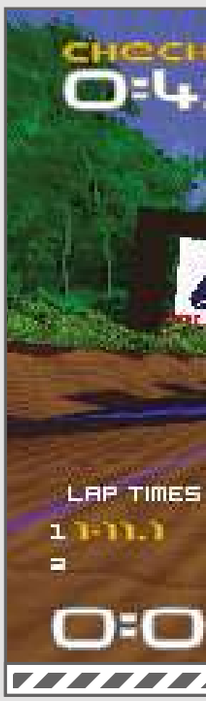
disk' – basically an expansion set to the original. The title was *WipEout 2097* in Europe because we didn't want to imply it was a full sequel. It was *WipEout XL* in the US because – apologies to all US citizens – someone at Psygnosis [was] determined that the US audience wouldn't understand the idea of 100 years in the future in the title and would question where the previous 2096 games were. The original proposed title for the US was *WipEout XS – Excess* – but I pointed out that this could be interpreted as 'extra small' and thus wasn't ideal!"

Beyond considering what to call his *WipEout* expansion, Andy also had overall responsibly for delivering the game with a team that included developers of the original *WipEout* and Psygnosis new starters. "As the new producer I was given a team: myself, Nick Burcombe – part time, three coders – two new to the studio, and six artists – including Nicky Westcott, who'd been one of the leads on the original."

In order to define the look of *WipEout 2097*, lead artist Nicky Westcott – now Nicky Place – drew inspiration from a range of eclectic sources, but Nicky remembers the original *WipEout* providing her team with their starting point. "The look was very much set by the original game, which was the brainchild of Jim Bowers – creative concept – and Nick Burcombe – game design. There is an big influence of Japanese culture that stemmed from our working so closely with The Designers Republic – more so than on the previous game. There is a huge mash up of influence in there: *Akira*, Japanese pop culture, Ken Ishii, British techno, British industrial and urban landscapes, *Blade Runner* and input via tDR's aesthetic – all forged around the original bones of the *WipEout* concept."

The approach taken by Nicky's team when designing the ships that would compete in *WipEout 2097*'s highly-stylised world was to build on concept artist Jim Bowers' *WipEout* designs, which as Nicky explains involved a variety of techniques. "The original ships were Jim's babies, the team names and pilots were Nick's. We built on these to develop new designs for *WipEout 2097*. Jim had made an amazing scale model of one of the ships, I think to help pitch the original idea – it was really the blueprint for everything else. It was down to the individual artists as to how the concepts were developed – they developed a mix of concept sketches or worked directly in the software, it was down to them."

While the production of *WipEout 2097*'s ships was largely down to Nicky and her artists, she shares credit for the creation of the game's courses with the title's designers and coders. "Building the circuits was very much an organic process – Nick and his team would develop initial ideas and plans, but it was left to the artists to create something that 'worked.' So we would build the tracks based on the plans, and create a 'flow' that felt natural, but we'd also create tricky turns to navigate and master. We had really fantastic in-house coders who wrote custom tools within Softimage to create these really easily, and they were really happy to refine [them] as we needed. We were able to tweak and change tracks to adjust the difficulty, or easily put in place huge leaps across chasms. The tracks were tested and tweaked – and then some – to make them as close to perfect as the designers wanted them. Everyone would play each others' tracks and give feedback, so in that way it was a group effort."



> **"I believe the success of WipEout came as a surprise to the Psygnosis/Sony executives. No sequel had been planned prior to its release"**
> Andy Satterthwaite

WIPEOUT 2097 REMIXED

A rundown of the WipEout 2097 ports

SATURN

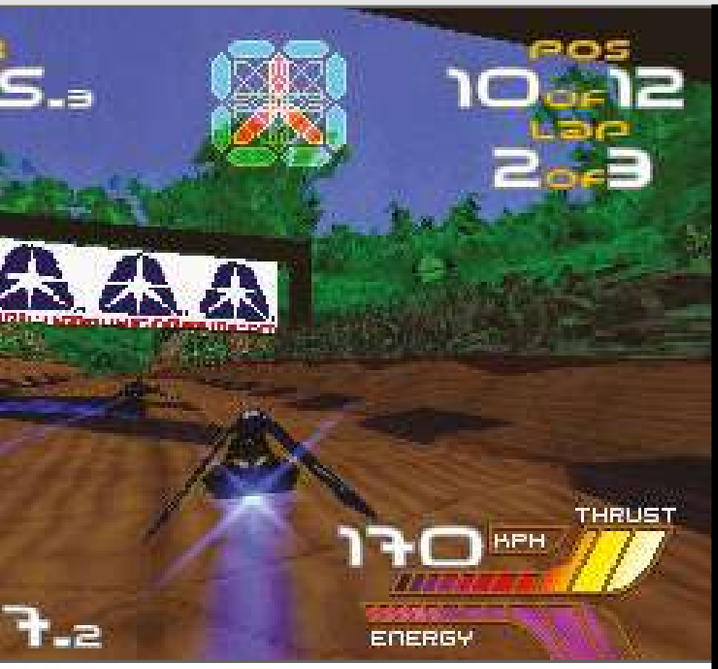
■ Compromises were made when adapting *WipEout 2097* for the Saturn, and as a result it lacks the flair of the original. Most noticeably, it has blockier graphics and radically simplified visual effects. It also runs slightly slower and features none of the licensed acts found on the PlayStation version of *2097*'s soundtrack.

PC

■ A faithful port that runs at a higher resolution than that of its PlayStation counterpart. But as with the Saturn version, the PC *WipEout 2097*'s soundtrack is exclusively by Psygnosis in-house musician Tim Wright rather than featuring the illustrious Techno artists who helped give the original game so much of its cool.

MAC AND AMIGA

■ These late arrivals received near polar-opposite receptions. The Amiga *WipEout 2097* was the first commercial 3D-accelerated Amiga title and was lauded for its advanced visuals and effects, while the 2002-released Mac *WipEout 2097* was criticised for being outdated, buggy and not supporting some controllers.



» A poorly placed racer tries to gain ground on the rainforest-located Valparaiso course.

As work progressed on *WipEout 2097*'s courses, producer Andy Satterthwaite set deadlines and calculated timescales, which resulted in him concluding that he could deliver more than the simple 'tracks disk' that he had been asked to produce. "The process for building tracks for the original was fairly well-defined. Nick Burcombe would design them on paper, the artists would make the tracks themselves in Softimage, it would be refined through playtests and then it would be 'skinned' to make the scenery. The 'skinning' process took about two man-months per track. We had to get the game out by October. Given our knowledge of the time-scale that things took, scheduling was pretty easy. We started at the beginning of January with one month to design and build 20 tracks, and then pick the best eight. Four track scenery artists, two tracks per artist and two months per track meant that all our 'track-skinning' should be finished by the start of June. Four weeks alpha, plus four weeks beta plus six weeks submission and manufacture equalled an October release. So that was the plan, except, what was I doing with the three coders in this time? It seemed foolish not to use them to make the game a heap better."

The combination of *WipEout 2097*'s tight deadline and Andy's sheer ambition resulted in pressure being placed on the game's developers, but rather than flounder they thrived, which lead artist Nicky attributes to focus and experience. "I think the deadline was purely down to marketing! The first game had been immensely successful and I think the deadline for *2097* was driven by a decision to capitalise on that. There was no denying it was pressured, but that pressure created a focus in the team and a desire to get things done and move on to the next thing. The team from the original formed the core of the newly expanded *WipEout 2097* team so we had developed a pretty good workflow by then."

THE DESIGNERS REPUBLIC Q&A

tDR's Ian Anderson on styling WipEout 2097

How did you originally become involved with Psygnosis/Studio Liverpool?
We were approached by *WipEout*'s author Nick Burcombe. When imagining the *WipEout* world, he was influenced by tDR's graphics so it was a natural move to ask us to realise his version of our vision. From supplying existing and creating new work for use in-game it was a logical progression to work with Sue Campbell on the packaging and brand development of the game.

Did they have specific ideas for *WipEout 2097*'s design or was it more collaborative?
WipEout 2097 is a consolidation and evolution of the visual language developed for the original game, based on the narrative positions set around 40 years on from *WipEout* itself. As we'd been given carte blanche to visualise the world in which *WipEout* existed, there was no need for anything more than cursory collaboration on *WipEout 2097* beyond synchronising the narrative.

How long did it take to create the artwork for *WipEout 2097*?
We developed and experimented with ideas as and when we had the ideas. In terms of delivering specific design assets both in-game and out – as well as booklet art and merchandise – probably around two to three weeks, with additional time spent co-directing and delivering the press/promotional campaign.

What tools did you use to create the main cover art?
Brains. Computers. Persuasion.

How do you go about creating a sense of speed when drawing art?
There are existing conventions such as italicised and /or (time) stretched typography and what *Eye* magazine called 'Go Faster Stripes'. There's also a sense of immediacy in the way some of the elements are created.

Where did the inspiration for the various logos / design come from?
Each team logo was an imagined evolution from the identities developed for the original game – we researched how real-world corporate IDs in general had advanced over an equivalent real time period, and applied the results with some additional fast history styling to create the new team branding for *2097*.

What did you think of the game compared to the original?
We viewed it purely as a logical evolution from the first in terms of our input – a scientific solution creatively expressed. I saw the gameplay as a playground for what tDR could have fun doing, a more fully realised proposition with an improved cohesive narrative.

Why do you think the art style remains so popular with gamers?
It was designed to.

» A desperate racer deploys a Quake Disruptor on his nearest rival.

メイキング

» A Feisar team racer leaves the starting grid of the Canadian Talon's Reach track.

MAKING GAMING 'COOL'

Andy Satterthwaite on launching WipEout 2097 with style

What are your memories of *WipEout 2097*'s UK launch at the hip nightclub, Cream?
I remember feeling completely out of my depth – I really wasn't a dance club guy. There were competition winners who'd won the chance to come to the launch and meet us. They wanted our autographs, which felt ridiculous because we didn't think of ourselves in that 'rock star' way. I think I just hung out by the bar until the Chemical Brothers came on, then danced a bit and went home drunk.

What was your involvement in the game's big Japanese launch?
I was flown out to Tokyo to do a press conference, largely consisting of playing the game on stage and answering questions through an interpreter. It was exciting and fun. I remember going to Akihabara to pick up Nintendo 64s to bring back – it was not yet released in the UK at the time – but it's all a bit vague!

▶ The ambition of the *WipEout 2097* developers matched their experience, and their equally ambitious producer, Andy Satterthwaite, recalls their push to expand on *WipEout*, designer Nick Burcombe's desire to improve the handling of the original game's ships and the creation of an iconic weapon by new-starter Chris Roberts. "The original game had four manufacturers of ships so we upped it to five, it had two ships per manufacturer in a race so we upped it to three. So we now had up to 15 ships in a race. It had two classes of race speed, so we upped it to four. But the bulk of the improvements were based on Nick's designs for all the things he wanted to improve in the original – largely around handling – and the weapon improvements that Chris Roberts – one of the new coders – came up with, including the legendary 'Quake' weapon, which originated when he was messing around with the track generation code to see how it worked."

A slew of imaginative weapons and power-ups followed, which lead artist Nicky Place puts down to cross-discipline collaboration. "I remember this being an organic process – the designers would outline what they wanted in terms of what it would do, and how it should behave, and then how it should sit on the track or in the environment – the artists, and programmers, would then work to make it 'real'. There wasn't really a set way to do anything, it was a genuine collaboration across design, art and coding with much of it driven by the short deadline – which meant we were making decisions and refining techniques as we went along."

A key difference between *WipEout 2097*'s weapons and its predecessor's would be their ability to inflict damage or destroy other ships, which producer Andy Satterthwaite views as a natural progression. "This was

» A giant, static airship hovers silently over two competitors tackling an unforgivingly tight bend.

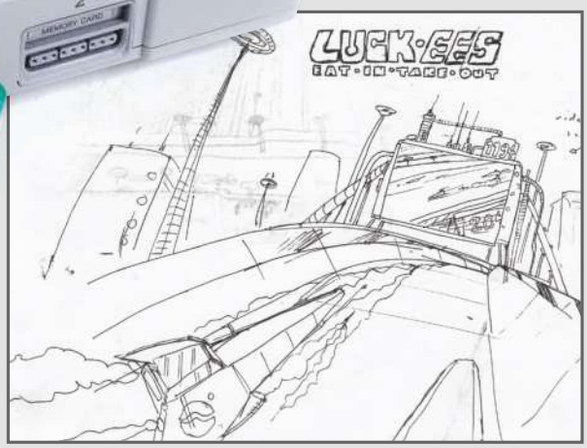
one of the evolutions of the design that Nick wanted. It was an obvious step and made more difference between the vehicles – as you could have stronger, slower ones and faster, weaker ones. [And] if you could shoot them then you could destroy them… it seemed obvious. To be honest, the pit lanes were a bit crap, and the solution employed by one of the later *WipEout* sequels, where you could reabsorb a weapon to heal, rather than fire it, was far more elegant."

In terms of gameplay differences, none would have more effect than addressing *WipEout*'s punishing track edges, which brought ships to a standstill when flown into. But as Andy reveals, these were far from simple to correct. "Fixing this was our most-desired change for the gameplay. The 'insta-stop' of the original was far too punishing, we wanted to have 'scraping' instead. Part

of the problem was that *WipEout* ships are largely triangular; so that when they clipped the sides of the track the natural reaction was that they rotated toward the wall. We had to compensate for that by pushing the nose of the vehicle out enough to make it not constantly collide but not so much as to push the player back into the centre of the track. For some reason it took far longer to get right than it should have done. I seem to remember losing my cool with Nick when he'd failed to mention some edge-case problem and we were running out of time pretty rapidly. Thankfully, Dave Rose, who was head of code at this point – I think – had been one of the programmers on *WipEout*, came to the rescue and fixed it. Once it was working as intended it made all the difference."

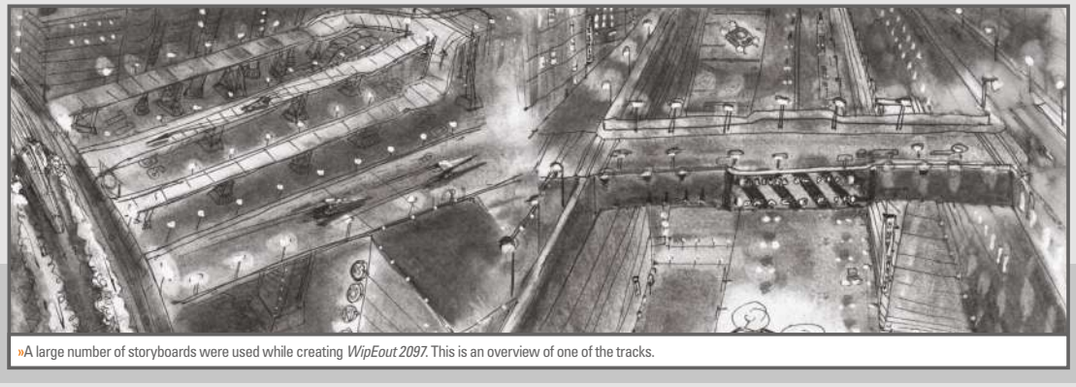
Another gameplay tweak saw *WipEout 2097* receive a greater number of AI racers than the original, who, as Andy points out, demonstrated better lane discipline. "The extra competitors were largely a numbers game; up the number to increase the competition. The game was a moving obstacle course, so having more obstacles made it more entertaining. I don't remember us specifically improving the collision detection between vehicles, but it's possible we did improve the collision between AI racers and the track. In the original, the opponents would happily fly through the scenery!"

Time and effort was also spent on developing *WipEout 2097*'s modes, with the game's Time Trial mode and Link mode standing out most in Andy's memory for quite different reasons. "Only the European version of *WipEout 2097* had ghost vehicles in Time Trial because Atari had a patent on ghost vehicles at the time from *Hard Drivin'*, but it was only a US patent. The Link mode was a specific request from Sony – as I recall. It was a huge pain because we had to keep everything in sync for it to work, which meant the game could never frame out. As the US / NTSC version of the game had to run at 30fps – as opposed to the 25fps of the PAL / European version – this proved one of the toughest challenges. I don't think it was worth it from a user perspective – I believe only about 1,000 link cables were sold in the UK, for example. But it was good for reviews; *Official PlayStation Magazine* gave us 9/10 in their review – but 10/10 with the Link mode."



> **"[Checkpoints] prevented a new player taking forever. You could reduce frustration by booting the player out and getting them to start again"**
> Andy Satterthwaite

Equal consideration was given to the game's five ship types, with each given unique handling and a different top speed, which would then be increased or decreased depending on the racing class chosen pre-game, but Andy doesn't remember this causing too many headaches. "Tweaking the vehicles was pretty easy. The challenges were: 1) making all vehicles feel different and still worth it within a class – we wanted to make it possible to win in all of them making the choice of manufacturer more of a personal preference, though in reality you either went for Feisar for easy handling or Piranha for speed; everything else was pretty pointless. I think Nick preferred Qirex 'cause he's a masochist! And 2) making the AI vehicles work at the different classes ... this is where Rob Francis came in. Nick was off designing another game at this point, so Rob came ▶



»A large number of storyboards were used while creating *WipEout 2097*. This is an overview of one of the tracks.

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** Psygnosis/Sony
- **» DEVELOPER:** Psygnosis
- **» RELEASED:** 1996
- **» PLATFORM:** Various
- **» GENRE:** Racer

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WIPEOUT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: Various
YEAR: 1995

DESTRUCTION DERBY 2
SYSTEM: PlayStation, PC
YEAR: 1996

FORMULA 1 97
SYSTEM: PlayStation, PC
YEAR: 1997

AURICOM

THE TRACKS OF WIPEOUT 2097

A course-by-course tour of WipEout 2097's world

1 TALON'S REACH Canada

■ Located in a dimly-lit industrial complex, Canada's Talon's Reach is a misshapen circular track surrounded on all sides by concrete, steel girders and exposed cabling. As *WipEout 2097*'s easiest course, Talon's Reach serves as a learning exercise for rookie racers in the art of air braking around corners.

2 SAGARMATHA Nepal

■ The snowy Nepalese mountaintop of Sagarmatha – better known in the West as Mount Everest – plays host to *WipEout 2097*'s second beginner track. A 'S' bend greets racers not far from the start and several tight bends follow. Sagarmatha also introduces racers to darkened tunnel flythroughs.

3 VALPARAISO Chile

■ Somewhat controversially sited in the South American rainforests of Chile, Valparaiso is the first of *WipEout 2097*'s intermediate courses. Boasting a tricky series of bends and a temple flythrough that gives very little room for error, Valparaiso provides *WipEout 2097* with its steepest difficulty curve.

4 PHENITIA PARK Germany

■ Built on the outskirts of Hamburg in a polluted business district, *WipEout 2097*'s other intermediate track, Phenitia Park, demands a different skillset to its counterpart Valparaiso. The course is defined by its uphill chicanes and jumps that require high speeds and perfect positioning to clear.

5 GARE D'EUROPA France

■ An abandoned metro line provides the backdrop for *WipEout 2097*'s atmospheric Gare d'Europa course. The first track of the game's third difficulty tier, Gare d'Europa crushes racers who don't learn its every twist and turn. Its showcase section rockets racers from a high tower down to the ground.

6 ODESSA KEYS Black Sea, Ukraine

■ Suspended over the Black Sea, the Ukrainian Odessa Keys track fulfils its third-level difficulty status by demanding split-second reactions from racers. 'S' bends that snake through neon-lit tunnels, jumps into near darkness and corkscrew ascents uphill provide some of Odessa Keys' more demanding challenges.

7 VOSTOK ISLAND Pacific Ocean

■ Based on a dormant volcano in the South Pacific, the experts-only Vostok Island course throws racers at a double figure of eight, over collapsed bridges and into an epic tunnel run. Although these hazards can be mastered, the brief countdowns between Vostok Island's checkpoints cut short all but perfect laps.

8 SPILSKINANKE America

■ The ultimate challenge offered by *WipEout 2097*, the fiendish Spilskinanke track runs through the broken remnants of an earthquake-stricken American city. Spilskinanke incorporates a twisted run through a dank sewer, a 90° bridge jump and a hairpin bend passing under a golden bridge.

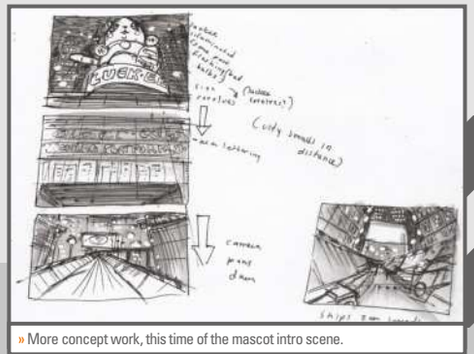
▶ on and tweaked and tweaked and tweaked. We had to make it so that every racetrack at every class was a meaningful challenge with every manufacturers' vehicle. It took Rob months of work playing and replaying and rebalancing the AI to get this right. I still don't think I ever completed the Phantom class, but I do know it's possible – in theory!"

The basic mechanics underpinning *WipEout 2097* were also worked on, with perhaps the biggest departure from the original game coming in the form of checkpoints, which Andy hoped would help reduce frustration. "Checkpoints offered a few things: an arcade feel, a bit of extra pressure and they allowed us to display split times on the HUD. They prevented a new player taking forever when they were losing. With a checkpoint system you could reduce frustration by booting the player out and getting them to start again."

Given how crucial *WipEout*'s music had been to its success, an effort was put into securing top acts for *WipEout 2097*'s techno soundtrack. Andy regards this aspect of the game's production as yet another organic progression, "The music was a natural evolution of the work that had been done on the original – and again it was marketing working with the record label. The big push was the inclusion of *Firestarter* by the Prodigy, which came in late in the piece – but that was driven by Nick Burcombe rather than me."

Despite its strict deadline, the *WipEout 2097* team also found time to include a wealth of hidden content, such as faster modes, tougher tracks and an advanced prototype ship unlocked by winning races. They also created crazy weapons and vehicles that could be unlocked with the controller buttons. Lead artist Nicky Place chalks the extra content up to enthusiasm and stress release. "People would just come up with these ideas [that ranged] from really cool to pretty nuts and would build stuff as a bit of a respite from the pressure of the day-to-day – it was great, as everyone was up for getting this extra stuff in the game, despite it being extra work, everyone was just so into it. It was a period of great energy and immense exhaustion at the same time – it was just a lot of fun."

While fully endorsing these hidden extras, producer Andy did have one heart-stopping moment thanks to their inclusion as the completed *WipEout 2097* was presented to Sony. "Their purpose was to give the players something to work toward. The secret ships – alien, flying pig, etc. – and the other stuff was good nonsense to throw in at the end, though the minigun



» More concept work, this time of the mascot intro scene.

» Full acceleration and careful positioning are required to successfully make this hazardous jump.

nearly killed the game due to a last moment bug as we were submitting for Sony approval."

Following its approval, *WipEout 2097* launched to great critical acclaim and impressive sales numbers, for which Andy remembers receiving the thanks of both Psygnosis and Sony. "We sold about a million copies, so they must have been pretty happy – and I was given plenty of praise. They certainly made enough other sequels so it must have been worth it at some level!"

Subsequently, gaming pods loaded with *WipEout 2097* were installed in Cream – the very coolest of techno clubs. An arrangement Andy perceived as entirely reciprocal. "I think it was a mutual embrace – the game embraced the music, the music embraced the game, it was all fast and exciting, and new and flashy, and looked good on big TV screens."

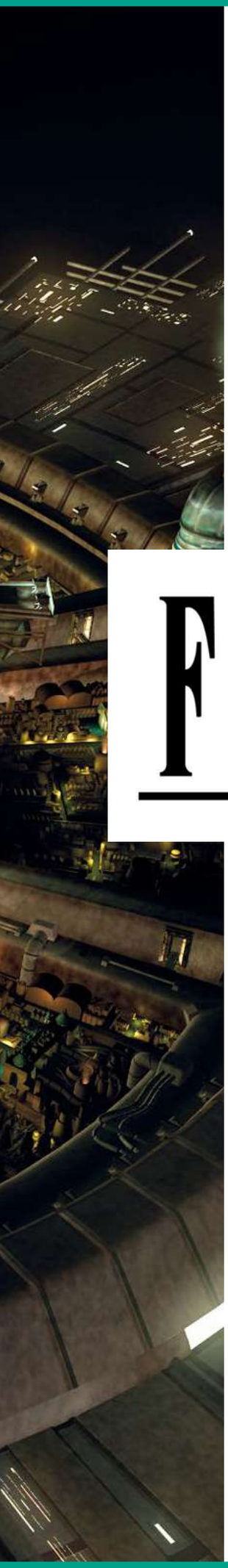
Looking back at *WipEout 2097* now, lead artist Nicky views her work not only in terms of its cultural impact, but also its crossover appeal. "I still think it looks amazing as a whole entity. Technically it has obviously been way, way surpassed by new technologies, but I believe it's really stood the test of time as a cultural piece. I also created the *2097* intro with Jim Bowers and I still think it looks incredible. I'm hugely proud to have been part of such an exciting and culturally important piece – I meet people all the time who tell me how it was their favourite game, or it got them into dance music, or into games, or a multitude of things – it's just been so influential."

When asked to review his first production, Andy relives the spectrum of emotions he felt while guiding *WipEout 2097*'s development and finishes on a note as upbeat as any on the game's soundtrack. "With hindsight, it was ridiculously stressful, stupidly fun and very simple all at the same time. I had an amazing team, a product I loved, a very understanding fiancé and a very understated goal to make a 'tracks disk', which just gave us every chance to excel expectations. I still have people asking about it now, so how can I not be proud of it? But really it was a product of a fantastic team working bloody hard on a product we believed in with minimal management interference – if you've got that you can do anything." *

Many thanks to Andy Satterthwaite and Nicky Place for revisiting *WipEout 2097*.

> **"We would build the tracks based on the plans, and create a 'flow' that felt natural, but also create tricky turns to navigate and master"**
> Nicky Place

» A golden bridge spans the first of several tight chicanes facing a pair of competitors.



FINAL FANTASY VII

In the mid-Nineties, Square's flagship franchise abandoned Nintendo's hardware and embraced the PlayStation, a move that would lead to Final Fantasy VII, an ambitious, refined and enormously influential RPG. Director Yoshinori Kitase and art director Yusuke Naora discuss the creation of this masterpiece with us in unprecedented depth. Steven Spielberg's Jaws fits into it somewhere, as Retro Gamer discovers…

Without hyperbole, *Final Fantasy VII* is the RPG that changed the genre. Opening the Western floodgates to Japan's own style of role-playing and popularising the entire sub-genre, the 10-million-plus-selling game was, for many players, their introduction to the potential of interactive storytelling and the first videogame narrative to leave a mark on them. It's also divisive, anecdotally referred to as the most returned game of all time and often criticised by Western RPG veterans – yet such cynicism can't mask the impact it had upon release in 1997. Along with *Gran Turismo*, *Final Fantasy VII* shifted millions of PlayStation consoles by demonstrating the machine's capabilities, captivating gamers with a fictional universe of unrestrained scope and style that would govern an entire corner of the industry. Back when the game was being created, Square (today known as Square Enix) was a company in transition, and the influx of talent that brought *FFVII* into being, as well as a development culture that fostered creativity, was ultimately responsible for this deservedly celebrated RPG.

At the 1995 SIGGRAPH computer graphics convention in Los Angeles, the company formerly known as Square presented an interactive demo to the world that showcased its *Final Fantasy* property in unprecedented fashion. This project

depicted three characters from *Final Fantasy VI* fighting a Golem enemy in full 3D, a jaw-dropping contrast to the SNES-based 2D roots of the game, complete with visual effects and cinematic in-battle camera angles that implied a future beyond the static staging of the series' stories up until that point. When you look at the tech demo now, you can absolutely see the founding technical conceit of *Final Fantasy VII* embedded within it. Squaresoft saw that *Final Fantasy* could be so much more on a platform that allowed the company to experiment with such high-end technical ideas.

The SIGGRAPH project would form the 'seed', as producer and creator Hironobu Sakaguchi dubbed it on a promotional video for the game, of *Final Fantasy*'s move into the next console generation. To any seasoned gamer, the most well-known part of the development of *Final Fantasy VII* is the defection that started it all. Long considered a Nintendo stalwart since the original *Final Fantasy*'s release on the NES in 1987, Square shifted to the PlayStation for its CD-ROM capabilities over the N64's comparatively limited cartridges. This fit the grand ambitions of this new sequel.

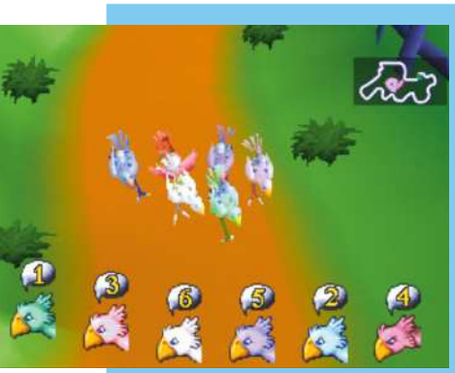
"We were fans of Nintendo's hardware, although in order to use CG movies in the game like we intended, we needed a lot of storage space, and for that reason decided on a platform that used the higher-capacity CD media," director Yoshinori Kitase tells us.

How ironic that this franchise would soar on a Sony platform, given that Nintendo publicly broke away from a CD-enabled SNES collaboration with the electronics giant earlier in the decade. The emerging disc format enabled *Final Fantasy VII* to be far more cinematic than its forebears – an important factor, especially to Sakaguchi. Yet an interesting factor in all this was the set of technical influences on the team, many of whom were from Western game development, as Kitase explains to us: "We looked at trends in the foreign-made PC games of the time, such as *Alone In The Dark* and *Heart Of Darkness* [and so on], and made it our objective to combine together smooth action sequences using polygon-based characters and clever camera work with the insertion of effective CG movies at a high level. I believe that we pretty much achieved our goals in this regard."

When it came to setting and story, *Final Fantasy VII* would similarly be a departure from series convention. While the previous entry in the series had a pronounced steampunk theme, the set of environments in the seventh game would vary massively from continent to continent, from a vast, polluted metropolis to backwater towns;

DISTRACTIONS

The best of Final Fantasy VII's many extra tasks and mini-games



Chocobos

Catching them, riding them, racing them and breeding them – the Chocobo element of *FFVII* is a game in itself, and becomes bewilderingly complex when you're looking to breed that lucrative Gold Chocobo, which can reach parts of the map that even the Highwind cannot.

Battle on Fort Condor

Visiting Fort Condor triggers this intriguing little strategy offshoot, where you fund small skirmishes to hold back Shinra forces from the giant bird perched atop the fort. It's no *Age Of Empires*, but it shows how diverse the ideas are in *FFVII*.

Snowboarding

On the second disc, Cloud gets the opportunity to snowboard down a mountain. Later in the game, it re-emerges as a tricky arcade game at Gold Saucer's Wonder Square. This mini-game was popular enough to justify a mobile spin-off, which is naturally only available in Japan.

Motorcycle Chase

One of the nicest surprises early on is an action-based mini-game where you have to protect your comrades from Shinra soldiers on bikes by ramming them off the road with Cloud's inexplicably large Buster Sword. It's great fun.

First-person shooting

Visiting the 'Speed' part of Gold Saucer triggers this bizarre but quite impressive first-person shooter section, where hitting a high score lands you a prize. This is notable for its kaleidoscopic visuals, in stark contrast to much of the game.

Battle arena

The only way to get Cloud's Omnislash Limit Break outside of the finale, and a clever means of extending the combat's appeal, the battle arena on Gold Saucer is a relentless challenge where you have to survive successive rounds of enemies and status ailments.

FINAL FANTASY VII'S UNSUNG HERO

Kitase weighs in on the oddly high popularity of Zack Fair, Cloud's former mentor

As you may recall, the entire flashback sequence where Cloud remembers the events in Nibelheim that led to Sephiroth's transformation into a twisted enemy turns out to be a bit different. Later, we learn that Cloud confused himself with Zack, his superior in the army. Ever since then, Zack has remained a popular figure among *Final Fantasy* fans, which led to the spin-off *Crisis Core*. His role in Cloud's story makes him a unique element in *FFVII*'s tangled web. "Zack is the vessel onto which Cloud twistedly projects his complexes towards SOLDIER [Shinra's elite fighting force]," Kitase tells us. "He was created by the scenario writer, [Kazushige Nojima], as he was trying to build up the mystery surrounding Cloud's past, and we did not originally think of Zack as a major character, but he seemed to be strangely popular with the fans. Much later on, Zack featured heavily in *Crisis Core*, and Mr Nojima was in charge of the scenario for both titles. When he first created Zack, I doubt that he could possibly have thought that we would be delving into the same character's story ten years on!"

» Even though players could avoid him entirely, Vincent earned his own cult reputation.

that clash of futuristic technology against these remnants of a beautiful old world.

We asked Kitase to discuss the inspirations for the planet's creation, and he graciously passed our questions on to *FFVII*'s art director, Yusuke Naora. "Initially we wanted to try something new by having a corporation as the major enemy while still keeping the game broadly in the fantasy genre," he explains, referring to the Shinra Electric Power Company. "Having decided on this concept, we actively included many steampunk-like elements to try to merge the appeal of traditional high-fantasy 'brick-built' structures and sci-fi elements at a high level. However, as there was to be magic present in this world, it would have been hard to have cyberpunk-esque unknown future technology sitting comfortably with the other influences, so we tried to keep that aspect down as much as possible."

Naora continues: "On the design side, we were also very much inspired to mix in things from many different periods in a semi-chaotic manner, including things from our everyday lives such as the newer buildings in Tokyo, the streets of Ginza, and the Shibuya station building." All this led to a laudably diverse set of environments, which still felt like a cohesive part of the same world.

The setting was closely connected to the narrative – the backdrop of *Final Fantasy VII*'s story is that the planet is suffering, being mined of resources by the ruthless Shinra, which is also a prominent military force. Yet the central conflict of the story is actually smaller-scale than that. For the developers, it was more about the symbiotic struggle between the hero, Cloud, and the calculated villain, Sephiroth, that drove the game forwards, as Kitase explains: "Throughout the story I really wanted to depict Sephiroth as an overwhelmingly powerful threat. However, if you have a villain as an actual opponent who appears before the heroes then however strong or charismatic you make the character, he will still feel very much 'life-sized' and limited in scope, reduced to another minor evil."

What source of inspiration helped the team tackle this issue? You'd be surprised. Kitase continues: "To solve this problem, I decided to present Sephiroth indirectly, making the player aware of his existence through hints and stories but not having him show himself before them much. The player sees the aftermath of his ruthless deeds but does not arrive at the source of the evil for a long time. This was the same method used by Steven Spielberg in the film *Jaws*. Finding the butchered President Shinra on the top floor of the Shinra building and the impaled body of the Midgar Zolom are moments symbolic of this approach."

Players don't properly encounter Sephiroth until they're around ten hours in, and even then it's in fleeting glimpses – we see him prominently in flashbacks, leading to the discovery about his sad origins and subsequent breakdown. He, along with the attached musical theme, *One-Winged Angel*, would become iconic aspects of *FFVII* upon release. Cloud, the amnesiac hero trying to piece his distressing memories back together, was an equal point of fascination for players. It's this dynamic, with their subsequently explored

> "We made it our objective to combine smooth action sequences with CG movies at a high level"

» *Final Fantasy VII*'s Materia system is so deep that it can eventually transform the entire rhythm of a battle, by letting you alter the conditions of it.

THE GREATEST MOMENTS OF FINAL FANTASY VII

Not featuring Cloud in a dress

THAT DEATH...

You knew it would be this – shocking, sad and brilliant on the part of the Squaresoft team, a certain character is murdered by Sephiroth at the climax of the game's first act. It's notable because it is so brutal, but this brave move to take the character out of the story meant *Final Fantasy VII* would be forever remembered by players.

OMNISLASH

The entire game builds to this final conflict between Cloud and Sephiroth, where the hero slices down the grey-haired villain in spectacular fashion, using his final Limit Break, Omnislash. All right, so it isn't necessarily the first time you use Omnislash, but it's still a thrilling component of the game's conclusion.

THE WEAPONS EMERGE OUT OF THE CRATER

Sephiroth unleashes Weapons on the planet, giant boss-style creatures that, when put together, look like something out of a Japanese monster movie. The idea of the optional super-boss is a *Final Fantasy* staple – here, they're made a key turning point in the story, in another example of Square's pioneering FMVs.

500 YEARS LATER...

After the credits, we're treated to this brilliant but somehow chilling scene, 500 years into the future. We see Nanaki and his children running through a canyon, before emerging onto a vista that shows an abandoned Midgar, overgrown and free of the technology that drained the life of the planet.

THE PRESIDENT IS DEAD

When Kitase alludes to *Jaws*, he's referring to this scene where the player reaches the top of Shinra Headquarters and finds the President dead, impaled by Sephiroth's katana. It's a brilliant way to bring the villain into the story, having him lurk just out of reach.

SUMMONING KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND

Knights of the Round was easily the most lavish summon spell in the entire series up until that point. The animation for the attack, Ultimate End, sees 13 knights battering the enemy with a slew of extraordinarily powerful moves; a just reward for the exhausting process of breeding a Gold Chocobo to get it.

SEPHIROTH WALKS INTO THE FLAMES

The highlight of the entire Nibelheim flashback, told from the village of Kalm early on in the story, is an eye-opening cinematic where Sephiroth turns away from Cloud into the flames, after the twisted warrior burns the town to the ground. Perhaps the most visually recognisable part of the game.

ZACK AND CLOUD ESCAPE NIBELHEIM

In this flashback, the events of the Nibelheim incident are fully disclosed. We learn that Cloud borrowed Zack's identity, and that this member of SOLDIER was gunned down by Shinra outside Midgar. This sequence is made all the more sad when you've earlier encountered Zack's parents in the town of Gongaga, where both his mother and father are completely unaware of his tragic fate.

EMERALD WEAPON SWIMS OUT OF THE DARKNESS

Late into the third disc, heading into the ocean with the submarine gives the player a few surprises, including the final whereabouts of the Turks, Shinra's agents whose paths cross yours throughout. That's before you see bubbles emerge out of the black, though – when the fearsome Emerald Weapon drifts towards you in terrifying fashion. Brr! It's an absolute bitch to kill, too.

GETTING THE HIGHWIND

Final Fantasy as a series is ingenious in the way it lets you manoeuvre around the world. When you get the Highwind, you can go almost anywhere in the entire world, a gloriously freeing reminder of the diversity of locations within the game.

history of bloodshed and trauma, that players hadn't seen before in *Final Fantasy*. "Furthermore, however far the player pursues him, Sephiroth is always just out of reach, and because of this our image of him becomes more and more idolised and idealised," explains Kitase. "This story structure also overlaps with the reasons that Cloud has such a complex about his own past, and I believe it is an effective tool for showing the relationship between the two characters."

All the character designs and their personalities were left in the hands of the designers, a break from previous games, where Sakaguchi would oversee their conception. This was also the first project where Tetsuya Nomura would be the sole character designer, who, having contributed work to *Final Fantasy V* and *VI*, replaced Yoshitaka Amano from the previous titles. A *Famitsu* interview with Nomura (translated by Andriasang) explains that Cloud was essentially his creation, yet Kitase told us that determining both the looks and personalities of every one of *Final Fantasy VII*'s iconic cast of characters was "largely the responsibility of [Nomura]". It marked a sea change for the series. Gone were the primarily medieval, dreamy heroes of Amano, and in came a fresh, exciting array of heroes that would have an extensive impact on Japanese popular culture – not to mention birth a string of ideas that would be appropriated into character clichés, like spiky hair and giant swords. Amano would still contribute character sketches and the iconic meteor logo, however.

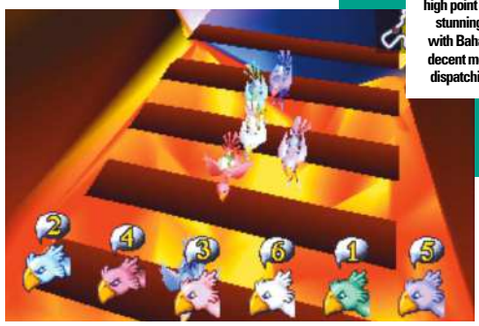
The immense back story for these heroes and villains was fine-tuned by scenario writer Kazushige Nojima, while many of the actual narrative ideas came from a unique exercise that once again showed Squaresoft's experimental approach. "When designing the game, we asked all staff on the *Final Fantasy* team to submit possible episode ideas for character back stories and created the overall stories by putting these together," says Kitase. "It was the scenario writer, Mr Nojima, who managed to put together a complete and detailed story from this massive pool of ideas, a process that was much like putting together a jigsaw puzzle."

This exercise led to an intriguing collection of stories across the cast of heroes, with one main plot driving it all: the planet's impending destruction at the hands of Sephiroth, where he would harness the world's natural defences – known as the Lifestream – for himself. The cast of *Final Fantasy VII*, including the tortured, unfocused Barret; last of an ancient race Aeris (or Aerith – a misspelling in the game's translation, as you probably know); and down-and-out pilot Cid Highwind; as well as more esoteric faces like the tomb-dwelling, optional companion Vincent Valentine, struck a chord with gamers, as their stories dovetailed skilfully with the main narrative.

These small tales, even Sephiroth's, traced back to the all-encompassing Shinra plot device – this corporation that is draining the planet of its resources. Given that *Final Fantasy VII* was made in the mid-Nineties, you could draw obvious

parallels with the real-world environmental issues at that time. Yet environmentalism, surprisingly, was not part of the team's storytelling agenda, Kitase explains: "We did not particularly plan on bringing out environmental destruction as a major theme of the game but rather intended the story to depict the internal struggles of Cloud and Sephiroth.

"However, if pushed I would say that this theme was not so much that of concern over destruction of the environment but more about how we wanted to show how civilisation and the environment coexist. Cloud and his companions first appear in the game as a group trying to take down the Mako reactors, but in the end we see them getting help from the Lifestream that is the source of that energy, and going forward into a future of coexistence with the planet. I believe that this theme of how we can strike a balance and live in harmony with the environment is one that is shared by all of us."



» [Top left] Catching and breeding Chocobos is one of the true tests of *Final Fantasy VII.*
» [Bottom right] *FFVII* is a high point for the series' stunning creatures, with Bahamut being a decent means of lazily dispatching enemies.

The Lifestream is the literal embodiment of the planet's energy, where all life emerges from and where it returns to with death. Its genesis came from Sakaguchi, who had come up with the idea as a reaction to tragic events in his own life. "When we were creating *Final Fantasy III*, my mother passed away," he said in a video to coincide with *FFVII*'s release. "And ever since, I have been thinking about the theme of life. Life exists in many things, and I was curious about what would happen if I attempted to examine life in a mathematical and logical way; maybe this was my approach in overcoming the grief I was experiencing."

> "SEPHIROTH IS ALWAYS JUST OUT OF REACH, AND SO OUR IMAGE OF HIM BECOMES MORE AND MORE IDOLISED"

With that delicate balance in mind, an antagonistic force like Shinra seemed suitable – it also presented a fine opportunity to go against the curve of the last six games. "We had a feeling that ideas for villains in RPGs had kind of become stale and repetitive, with it always being something like a massive dragon or an evil ruler who had acquired an ancient power," says Kitase. "When we asked ourselves what a more modern take on a powerful evil would be, we came up with the idea of a corporation that pollutes the environment for excessive profit."

The most talked-about moment in this complex tale, though, would be the death of a major character. One of the conditions of running our exclusive interview from Square Enix was that we wouldn't reveal this character's name – but you know which

RANDY PITCHFORD

CEO, Gearbox Software

"**Obviously, role-playing** games were a huge influence on *Borderlands*. *Final Fantasy* offered many of the standards and tropes that are borrowed by many role-playing games of today. The engagement and motivation that comes from levelling up and the draw of collecting loot first became clear to all of us when we did such things with pencil-and-paper games. While many PC games applied these principles, *Final Fantasy* managed to capture the design in a most accessible way at a time when our controllers had only a D-pad and two buttons. The elegance of the *Final Fantasy* approach to role-playing has inspired a generation.

In fact, the very first videogame that my wife and I played together from beginning to end was the first *Final Fantasy* game on the NES. To this day, we have fond memories of that experience and an irrational loyalty to the franchise. I know that many people see *Final Fantasy VII* as the high-water mark for the series, but for me it was the earlier *Final Fantasy* games on the NES and Super Nintendo that have had the most impact."

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...

SEQUELS IN FINAL FANTASY

FINAL FANTASY X-2

Solid and technically superb but tonally misfiring, *Final Fantasy X-2* took *FFX*'s timid protagonist, Yuna, then popped on some hot pants and gave her a couple of guns. The game's 'Perfect' ending is almost worth playing through it alone for fans of the first game, though.

FINAL FANTASY IV: THE AFTER YEARS

Originally released on mobiles in Japan, then through WiiWare and again on the PSP with *Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection*, *The After Years* is a direct sequel that is built with the look of the original SNES title. The PSP version presents it in the most coherent, beautiful form.

DISSIDIA 012[DUODECIM] FINAL FANTASY

Forget the stupid title. Aside from the unfortunate shortage of new content, this sequel to the fan-service-packed original is a top-notch action RPG that was snubbed last year, no doubt affected by the PSP's atrocious piracy rates. Nevertheless, it comes packaged with the first game, so get it if you have the chance.

one we're talking about. Everyone knows it. You might have spent hours training this character up before the event occurred. It didn't matter. This character was wiped out of the story. Such a brave decision would be the defining moment, and it stunned this new generation of JRPG fans, and is still the subject of much conversation today.

It is odd that Square Enix declined to comment on the sequence, having done so in the past – even Kitase himself, back in 2003. It could be that the company is hoping new gamers discover *Final Fantasy VII* through the PlayStation Store, or that something new involving the game is in the pipeline. Either way, that moment was designed by Square to create a sudden void in the player, to make them think they'd have acted differently were they to know it was coming.

There are more surprises besides, though. A major plot point some way into the game sees the threat level raised significantly as giant creatures, a super-boss motif of the series known as Weapons, march into the overworld and heighten the drama of the closing act. The Emerald and Ruby Weapons are especially tough to beat, yet incorporating these powerful entities as part of the Sephiroth storyline imbued them with a new importance. Kitase explains why the team opted to do this: "In all *Final Fantasy* games, we always put in very powerful monsters in the latter parts of the game to challenge dedicated players and to deepen the gameplay experience, enhancing the longevity of the title and giving something to do aside from the main quest. We had already got the concept of the Weapons as defenders of the planet for *FFVII* and so decided to tie that together with these play-enhancing features."

> "WHEN THINKING ABOUT A MODERN TAKE ON A POWERFUL EVIL, WE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF A CORPORATION"

But the story, despite forever being the guiding light for the *Final Fantasy* series, was matched by *FFVII*'s immense technical and mechanical advances. Creating a masterpiece of this calibre, with such scope in setting and the jaw-dropping amount of iconography that would define Japanese RPGs from there on, was the product of a talented group of people, sharing a potent creative culture. We asked Kitase about the team's dynamic at the time.

"Before *FFVII* we only really had 2D pixel art designers, but for this project many 3D CG specialists and designers came in from outside the company, leading to an interaction of various working cultures that was very stimulating," he says. "All the in-house designers also started to learn to use CG tools, and we held a lot of seminars and explanation meetings. I personally received instruction in how to use Alias PowerAnimator, and around a tenth of all the character motions seen in the game's event scenes were actually created by me!"

We had to ask Kitase if anything changed in development – and, as it happens, Square had a relatively airtight vision of *FFVII*, with only one change that fans will definitely have noticed. "The only thing that we had to change during development was the level of deformation on the characters. The fact that the characters are depicted at different levels of deformation in the field, battle and CG sections is a remnant of these changes." Whereas field characters ended up being blocky 3D models, the characters in battle had far more detail. As Kitase mentions, too, you can see this difference in CG movies – some depict the characters in blocky form, while others, like Sephiroth before the flames of Nibelheim, are more impressively realised. It's a curious inconsistency, but of course forgivable in the face of the finished product's other achievements.

The locations have aged better, thanks to the heavy use of prerendered backgrounds. Yet part of *Final Fantasy VII*'s appeal to long-time fans was the introduction of a fully 3D world map. Despite the cinematic touches present in other parts of the experience, the world map was seen as an updated version of the SNES overworld. "This part of the game was not actually all that much of a challenge," says Kitase. "It goes without saying that, at the time, creating data for a 3D map was hard work, but for better or worse we decided to do the map along pretty similar lines to a 2D world map from the *Final Fantasy* games of the Super Famicom era, so there were not a lot of

» The game's early Tifa/Aeris choices give you an opportunity to damage a girl's self-esteem.

THIS PLANET AS MY VESSEL

With insight from Final Fantasy VII's art director, Yusuke Naora, we pick out key locations from the story

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

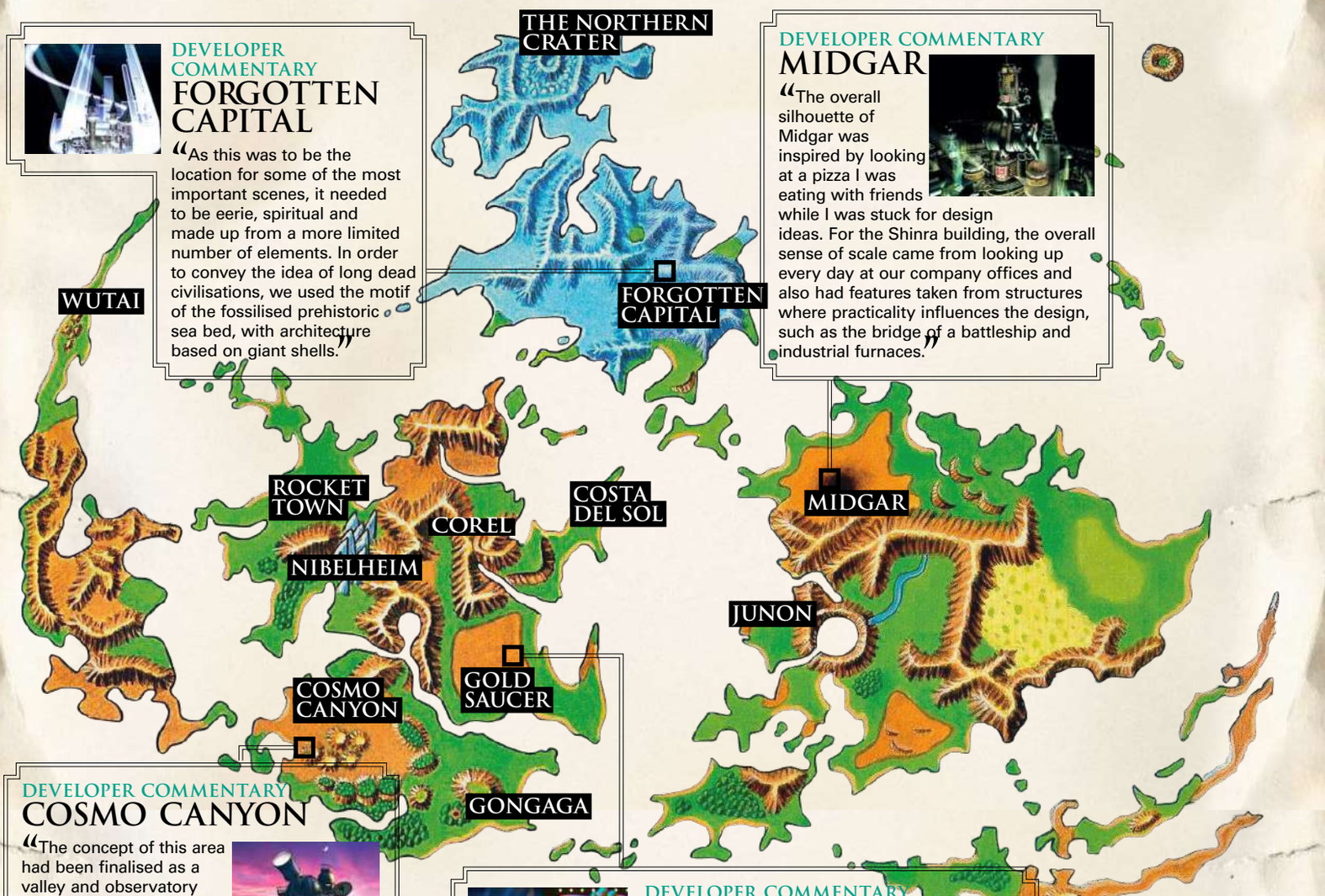
FORGOTTEN CAPITAL

"As this was to be the location for some of the most important scenes, it needed to be eerie, spiritual and made up from a more limited number of elements. In order to convey the idea of long dead civilisations, we used the motif of the fossilised prehistoric sea bed, with architecture based on giant shells."

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

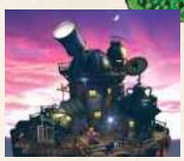
MIDGAR

"The overall silhouette of Midgar was inspired by looking at a pizza I was eating with friends while I was stuck for design ideas. For the Shinra building, the overall sense of scale came from looking up every day at our company offices and also had features taken from structures where practicality influences the design, such as the bridge of a battleship and industrial furnaces."



DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

COSMO CANYON



"The concept of this area had been finalised as a valley and observatory like the Grand Canyon, so I had the designers put in more of a medieval feel, with fantasy elements such as the clockwork 'cosmic spheres' planetarium and the gyroscope compass."

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY

GOLD SAUCER

"As there were a lot of mini-games in the title, I set the question of, 'What would an amusement park in this world be like?' and made sure everyone had fun when designing this area."

☐ JUNON

A port town that is also a military base, Junon is attacked later on by Sapphire Weapon, where the giant Junon cannon ceremoniously takes it down.

☐ THE NORTHERN CRATER

This is where Jenova landed about 2,000 years before the start of the story – a creepy, expansive crater where the climax of the game takes place.

☐ NIBELHEIM

As more observant players will know, after Nibelheim was burnt down by Sephiroth, the entire town was rebuilt by Shinra and the citizens replaced with its employees in a cover-up.

☐ COSTA DEL SOL

An utterly bizarre, Spanish-style holiday town with a relaxed atmosphere, players could later buy an overpriced house in this pleasantly different part of the world map.

☐ GONGAGA

This sad little town is the location of an exploded Mako reactor, with the citizens mourning their lost. Like a sister town of Nibelheim, in a strange way.

☐ WUTAI

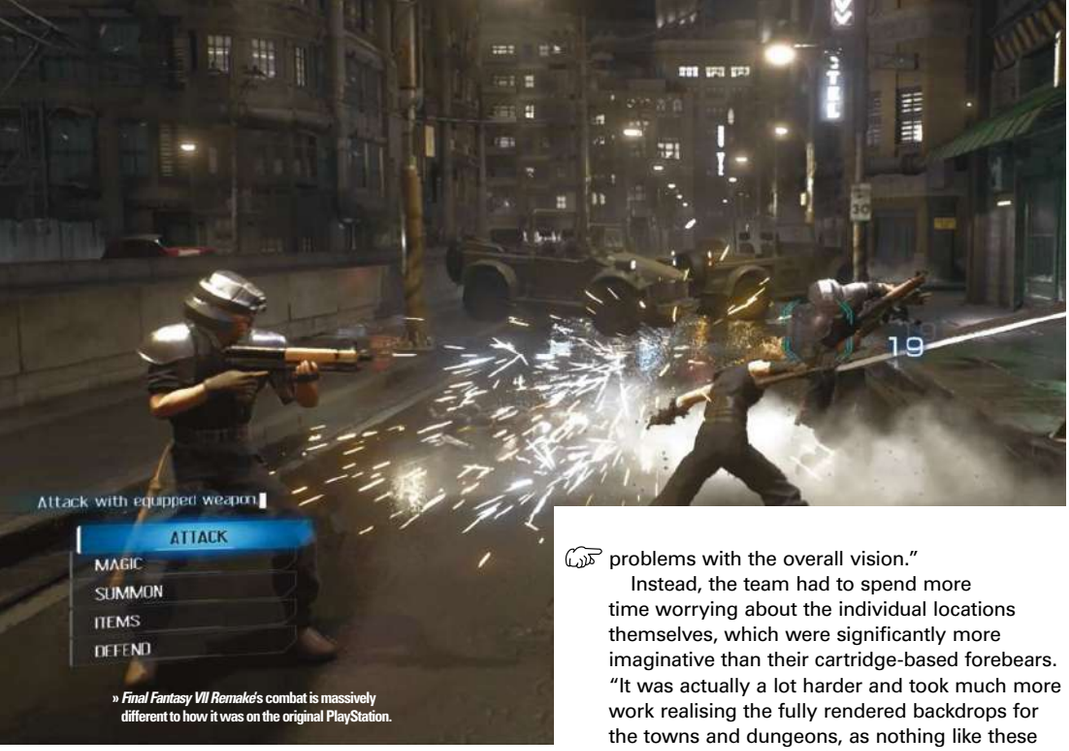
A more culturally differentiated locale to everywhere else, Wutai is the sole town on the far western continent, and marks the only location where the heroes team up with the Turks.

☐ COREL

Barret's hometown-turned-post-Shinra-wreck, this is where you can catch the lift to the far more jolly Gold Saucer. There's a ruddy superb chase sequence here later in the game, too.

☐ ROCKET TOWN

Built around a launchpad, this is where one of the more interesting characters, foul-mouthed pilot Cid Highwind, hails from. It's a cheerful moment when they finally get the rocket into space.



» *Final Fantasy VII Remake*'s combat is massively different to how it was on the original PlayStation.

problems with the overall vision."

Instead, the team had to spend more time worrying about the individual locations themselves, which were significantly more imaginative than their cartridge-based forebears. "It was actually a lot harder and took much more work realising the fully rendered backdrops for the towns and dungeons, as nothing like these had ever been done before at the time. Having said this, the world map in *FFVII* did play a very important role in the game. After the first part, which is spent in the oppressive and cramped environment of Midgar, the feeling of liberation and freedom at the moment when you step out onto the world map is one of the game's most memorable highlights." That's completely true, and this was a stone's throw from making it into our list of favourite moments. *FFVII* progressively puts more power in the player's hands through the way they interact with the world.

Random battles would remain part of the series, but as directed by the SIGGRAPH presentation, the actual look of them marked an exciting leap between generations. "We had decided on the idea of battles in 3D, with the camera panning and zooming around the action, from before beginning development on *FFVII*. In 1995, we created a prototype game based on doing the battles from *FFVI* in 3D and showcased it at the SIGGRAPH convention that year. This test game was made with an eye to perfecting the idea for the battles in *FFVII*."

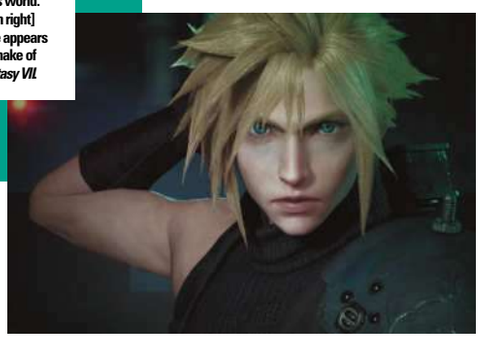
Aided by the straightforward yet endlessly customisable Materia-based ability system, as well as visually extravagant Limit Break attacks, the combat in *Final Fantasy VII* would never become a chore. This title also saw the best work of composer Nobuo Uematsu, building on his incredible music in *FFVI* with a series of stunning and highly memorable themes and leitmotifs. Any poignant, dark or pleasant instance is helped along enormously by his work, and he made an easy collaborator for Square. "We basically just showed Mr Uematsu the character designs and the scenario, and had him familiarise with the overall themes and images of the game before letting him loose. There were no specific detailed requests, and he was allowed to create the score comparatively freely," says Kitase.

> "IT TOOK A LOT OF WORK REALISING THE RENDERED BACKDROPS, AS NOTHING LIKE THEM HAD BEEN DONE BEFORE"

While HD technology and high-capacity storage media has let Square Enix realise the most elaborate of visions with *Final Fantasy*, there is something pure about the seventh game. It's such a well-rounded experience that it's obviously the product of a developer at a peak of creativity. Being the first *Final Fantasy* released in Europe, and armed with a slightly misleading marketing campaign that focused on FMVs over gameplay, it turned a historically marginalised genre into an international phenomenon.

Final Fantasy VII's appeal was so widely adopted that fans and curious outsiders alike frequently petitioned Square Enix for it to receive the remake treatment. This campaign lasted over a decade, and in 2020 fans finally got what they desired… well, part of it at least, because this reinterpretation is coming in instalments.

The first 'chapter' of the *FFVII* remake series takes place entirely in Midgar, covering events from the Bombing Mission up to the exhilarating motorcycle chase after the raid on Shinra's HQ. It's a breathtaking showing, too, presenting the game like never seen before with full voice acting. That's not all, though, as the battle system has been expertly rewired to accommodate a more action-oriented style of play. Plus, there's speculation on whether this is actually a remake. There are instances where characters – particularly Sephiroth – seem to know exactly what the road of fate has in store for them. Plus, what are these 'Whispers' the so-called 'arbiters of fate'? There's a lot of questions to be answered, but this is an exciting interpretation of the *Final Fantasy VII* canon worth following. ✱



» [Top right] The Forgotten Capital is a bizarre locale, and is still the most atmospheric part of this world. » [Bottom right] Cloud as he appears in the remake of *Final Fantasy VII*.

CONSTANTIN JUPP

Assistant producer, Media Molecule

"***Final Fantasy VII*** made me realise that games were so much more than just running or shooting or fighting. Far from mindless entertainment, they could actually stir emotion within the player. It's the game that inspired me to join the games industry and help create those experiences for others."

The Anatomy of CLOUD

He carries a big sword and always seems miserable, but just how much do you know about Final Fantasy poster boy Cloud?

SWORD & SORCERY

Though there is a whole load of swords for you to equip to Cloud that you gather throughout the game, none are as iconic as his famous starting weapon, the gigantic Buster Sword. It'd never work in real life, of course, but then never would Cloud's unfeasibly pointy hair. Besides, *Final Fantasy VII* is a game about a half-alien madman trying to destroy the planet being stopped by a magic wielding team that includes a man with a gun for an arm and a talking cat. In other words, forget about realism and embrace that badass sword.

TROUBLE & STRIFE

A poster boy for angst, Cloud's sullen demeanour early on in *Final Fantasy VII* has earned him a not-undeserved reputation as being a bit of an arse. As the game progresses, however, Cloud softens up a little as we get to know his backstory and the arrogant, uncaring front he puts up is broken down. Cloud begins as a former member of elite military unit SOLDIER, working as a mercenary for freedom fighters AVALANCHE. However, there's more to Cloud's past than meets the eye…

JACK OF ALL TRADES

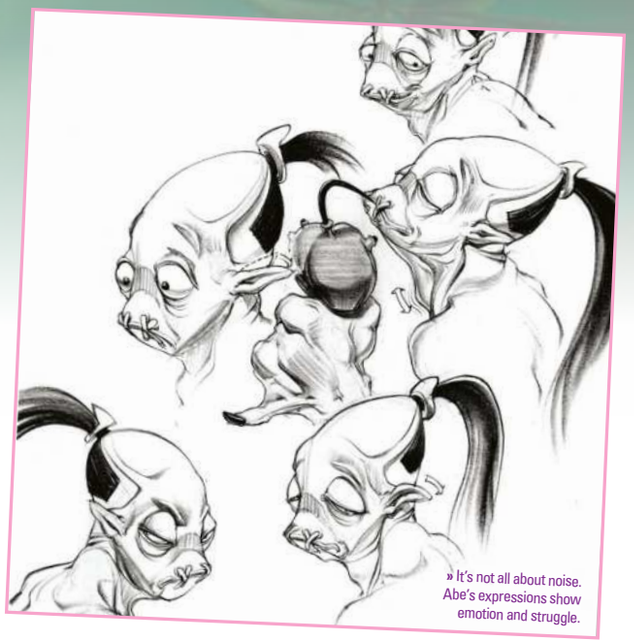
Cloud is unquestionably the best character in *Final Fantasy VII* from a gameplay perspective, in part because he's an all-rounder with high stats in all categories. He's got good attack power, meaning you'll probably want him in the front row to dish out damage. But he's also the second best magic caster after Aeris, so you can focus on magic with him if you choose. If that's not enough, Cloud's got the most powerful Limit Breaks in the game, his signature move and final Limit Break being the devastating Omnislash.

SUPERSTAR

As well as being the protagonist of *Final Fantasy VII*, Cloud has made a number of other appearances. He appeared in the *Final Fantasy* themed fighting game *Dissidia Final Fantasy*, *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts 2*, *Theatrhythm Final Fantasy* and *Chocobo Racing*, amongst others. He's even made an appearance in a film (albeit a rubbish one) in the form of *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.

ODDWORLD
THE HISTORY OF

The original Oddworld was a surprise PlayStation hit. David Crookes talks to Lorne Lanning about the impact of Abe's Oddysee and the rest of a series that fell short of its fifth planned game



» It's not all about noise. Abe's expressions show emotion and struggle.

A character who can break wind is always a winner. Even if that character is an alien with bulbous, bloodshot eyes, a high ponytail of hair made from feathers and a skinny, almost malnourished torso; the ability to let one go, while undoubtedly disgusting, is yet all too endearing to ignore.

It may not be a tool employed by many other gaming characters, but perhaps Sonic, Mario and even Lara could give it a go. Then again, they have not quite endured the life of Abe, star of the *Oddworld* games, whose backstory would make noises emit from all but the toughest of bottoms.

Abe's days are spent scrubbing floors and suffering heartless beatings from Sligs, the backbone of a repressive society's industrial security team. Things take a rather sinister turn when Abe accidentally discovers that he and his fellow Mudokon workers are not merely slaves, but fodder for the machines used at the vast Rupture Farms food processing plant where they toil each day.

Lucky then that Abe emerges as the 'chosen one' and is able to pursue the ousting of dictator Mulluck the Glukkon and his evil regime, thereby freeing the downtrodden from their horrific plight.

Today, such determination to stick one to 'The Man' and spark an uprising would undoubtedly involve Twitter. Technology-free Abe treads a rather more conventional path, stomping around on foot, meeting other slaves in person and cheerily urging them to "follow me" – but not too closely, you would hope.

"From a story perspective, all of the *Oddworld* stories were inspired from the dirty deeds of the dark side of globalisation," explains Lorne Lanning, who co-founded American developer Oddworld Inhabitants with fellow special effects and computer animation expert Sherry McKenna. "And it was the stories that convinced Sherry to get involved and do this whole thing with me."

Work began on the plot in January 1995. "We took big inspiration from *Flashback*, *Out Of This World* and *Myst*, and it worked well," Lorne continues. "We started to create an intriguing world." Ideas were bounced off designer Paul O'Connor and the crew to work out what would work and what could be altered should production hit any issues.

Originally, the idea was to call the game *SoulStorm*, but other games at the time had the word 'Soul' in them so a new moniker was found to avoid confusion. There were also initial thoughts over making the game 3D, but this was scrapped in favour of 2D, even though the advent of the 32-bit consoles showed a market going the other way.

The game drew on the gaming styles of old – right down to an 8-bit flick-screen mechanic – and that was due to Lorne's belief that there was still mileage left in 2D gaming. Lorne had also been working with 3D for the previous decade and didn't believe the crop of 3D games on the PlayStation were outstanding enough to prompt a switch.

Still, the assets were built in 3D. The bitmaps for the game were pre-rendered and this, in a sense, produced 2.5D with rich image depth and detail. "We didn't want to launch 'low poly world' to establish the first impression of the *Oddworld* Universe," Lorne says, revealing that the plan to build a five-part story – *The Oddworld Quintology* – was foremost in his mind.

» Lorne Lanning is the driving force behind *Oddworld*.

As well as beautiful visuals and slick cut-scenes that blended into the gameplay, a major part of *Oddworld* was the feature Gamespeak. It allowed Abe to talk, whistle and, yes, fart, and it was crucial for gameplay and for humour. Seldom failing to raise a smile, it was seen as so important that it was included in the demo Lorne hawked around to publishers to whip up interest and investment in the game.

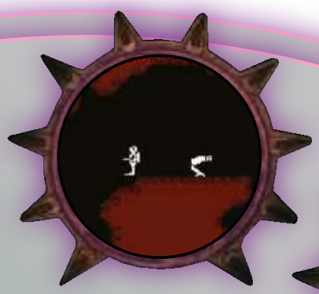
» Abe will often have to use others in order to progress.

The debut title also had an artificial intelligence routine called Aware Lifeforms In Virtual Environments (or ALIVE for short). This controlled the actions of the game's creatures according to the situation they were faced with and the type of character they were. Abe could therefore decide to solve some puzzles and ignore others, and the player could even trick Sligs into shooting each other.

Abe could also chant and possess other characters, using them to solve puzzles or carry out a killing. Although Lorne wanted shooting in the game he didn't want Abe to have a twitchy trigger finger himself, and this was a way around such a situation (keen watchers will also note, incidentally, that Abe had four fingers in the debut game but only three thereafter – this was to avoid causing offence in Japan where four-fingered characters are banned out of respect for meat-packing workers who often lost fingers in work-related accidents). *Abe's Oddysee* progressed well and was earmarked for a PlayStation and PC release. ▶

ODD WORLDS

We examine other games set in bizarre universes



FANTASTIC VOYAGE 1982

■ Zooming through the body of a brain-damaged scientist, this game was inspired by the Sixties movie of the same name. Items of note included a lung, yellow cholesterol and other such inside-of-body organs and happenings.

ANT ATTACK 1983

■ The walled city of Antescher was inhabited by giant ants which would be annihilated by lobbing grenades. Gamers could play as a man or woman and try and rescue hostages. A B-movie of a game.

ANOTHER WORLD 1991

■ Young scientist Lester explores a treacherous alien world with dangerous indigenous animals and humanoid creatures. Cinematic, and with use of the rotoscoping animation technique, players loved the enormous fictional universe.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL 1992

■ Talking pigs? Tick. Or rather, raise eyebrows. A commercial failure it may have been, but the planet Hyllis was under siege and freelance hack Jade was just the sort to go head-to-head with the alien race, Domz.

HEART OF DARKNESS 1998

■ The Darklands was a foreboding place with winged shadow creatures and monsters. Controlled by the Master of Darkness, you didn't always want to avoid death given the deliciously explicit meet-the-maker scenes you'd witness.

THE LONGEST JOURNEY 1999

■ Set in a parallel universe, this point-and-click adventure game saw April Ryan shifting between Arcadia and Industrial Stark and all of the various hazards that were present in each of them.

» Early artwork – this from 26 April 1995 – shows the thinking behind the strange nature of the world Abe inhabits.

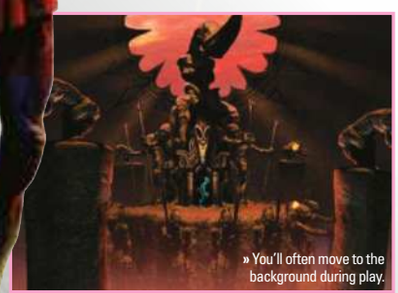
Abe's Oddysee was a huge success and it sold well in the lead up to Christmas, prompting a Game Boy version called *Oddworld Adventures* to be released in 1998. If there was a complaint, it was the lack of a quick-save facility – "It was maddening that we delivered without getting it in the first time," muses Lorne. "Chalk it up to lessons learned." – but the team made sure it was implemented in the sequel.

"We had just nine months to release *Abe's Exoddus* for Christmas following *Oddysee* 's release," recalls Lorne. "It was a super crunch all the way through the entire development, and this was less than half the time that *Abe's Oddysee* took us to develop. But it was more complicated as we also believed we needed 'twice the game' in sheer poundage."

The second game in the series, which was released in November 1998, picked up where the debut game left off. Abe had become a celebrity but was told that the Glukkons, a leading, ruthless, capitalist, industrial race with a disregard for worker rights, was grabbing blind Mudokons and enslaving them to excavate a Mudokon burial site. With a poison being created from the bones of the dead, Abe had to find a cure for the illness and prevent the creation of SoulStorm's brew.

This time out, the characters became more emotionally engaging and the

» With a face like that he should be easy to spot…



» You'll often move to the background during play.

pace picked up. Gamespeak instructions were used to command multiple Mudokons at the same time, and Mudokons found it harder to follow Abe because many of them were blind. For Lanning, it was about giving the game a further level of polish, depth and challenge.

"Our approach to the game was pretty much compatible with how you would approach a film," says Lorne. "With both you start with a script, but we then used an additional layer of game mechanics that we knew we wanted to implement or evolve upon.

"So starting with these two key high-level components we worked them up simultaneously. We integrated the script tightly against the ramping of mechanics in gameplay. Our target was continually working to try to find a tighter fusion of narrative that was not only engaging as a story, but was also informative and foreshadowing of new play mechanics that would be coming up next for the gamer."

The first game had a heads-up display, but this was dropped for the sequel. "It was a goal of mine to try to eliminate any menu elements that broke the reality horizon," Lorne explains. "Floating GUI elements reinforce for you 'this is a game' and for the original *Abe* games we wanted to get away from that impression and instead try to instil the sensation of the player being responsible for these people living in this world."

In trying to remove all traces of the traditional heads-up display, Oddworld Inhabitants attempted to find more clever, subtle methods of communicating necessary information, and tried to do it in more logical ways so that it felt more like a film. "We wanted the elements to feel like they were within the world rather than a HUD layered over the world," Lorne continues. "It was attempting to accomplish a deeper impression of a 'living creature adventure', rather than just a 'gaming adventure'."

The emotions helped bring the creatures to life. "The second game had more entertainment value as well as a stronger emotional relationship to these silly little characters," says Lorne. "We always want you to laugh when you're playing our games, regardless of how dark their subject matter is."

And dark is a good description. Much of that is down to Lorne himself. He is a deep thinker who, with the *Oddworld* series of games, was aiming to craft a gameplay and story experience that drew on a sense of injustice. Festering in the back of Lorne's mind was a concern for disturbing human rights abuses by powerful corporations from the shipping docks of Bangladesh to the diamond or gold mines in South America and South Africa. He wanted *Oddworld* to have a dark premise but

» Cut-scenes did a great job of conveying Abe's weird and wacky personality.

follow the lead set by *The Simpsons* and *The Daily Show*, both of which refrain from getting up on a soap box. Like them, he did not want to lose sight of *Oddworld* as entertainment and believed that humour and narrative would combine to raise important issues.

He denies that the series is political. "Personally, I think politics is for chumps," he says. "It's for suckers who still believe they have people fighting for their interests in the greater halls of power and often willingly refuse to see that their would be heroes have been completely compromised." But he talks of an "insane elite class of globalists actively ruining the planet for the rest of us and for their own short-term power gains".

"It was always these practises that inspired the content of *Oddworld*, as these stories started taking shape 20 years ago," Lorne ▶

» Abe's world is a seriously oppressive one. Poor Abe.

ODD ADVENTURES

Your guide to Abe and co's numerous retail releases

ABE'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1997

ABE'S EXODDUS
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: GT INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1998

ODDWORLD ADVENTURES
DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1998

ODDWORLD ADVENTURES 2
DEVELOPER: SAFFIRE
PUBLISHER: SAFFIRE
PLATFORM: GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 2000

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2001

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE
DEVELOPER: ART CO
PUBLISHER: THQ INC
PLATFORM: GAME BOY ADVANCE
YEAR: 2001

STRANGER'S WRATH
DEVELOPER: ODDWORLD INHABITANTS
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PLATFORM: XBOX
YEAR: 2005

» *Munch's Odyssey* was Abe's first proper 3D adventure.

» Munch was the main protagonist of the third game.

▶ continues. "So for me, I look deep into the darkest practises of the kleptoclass in a constant search of vehicles to inspire fiction from these practises in an effort to transform that darkness into a launch point for some seriously relevant and deeply ironic modern myth humour."

Lorne's outlook had an effect on the types of enemies in the game that were always designed around how they would play. The Glukkons were inspired by the kleptoclass. "Big shots bossing people around while ultimately being pretty useless parasites. Like bankers," he says. New enemies were also introduced including Flying Sligs, Slugs, Mine Cars and Greeters. "They were all first designed as challenges within our code reach, then we interpreted the mechanics into themed characters," Lorne says.

Following yet further acclaim, Lorne and his team pushed on with the third of the planned five games. The loyalty to PlayStation had gone and *Munch's Oddysee* was being slated for an exclusive November 2001 release on the Xbox.

As with the other games, there were two endings. "We did this because we always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game, but if you played the game without empathy, we wanted you to get an ending that reflected your personal character," says Lorne. "If you went through our journey as a heartless douche, we wanted to remind you what a schmuck you were being and how it would ruin the fate of those you were supposed to be helping."

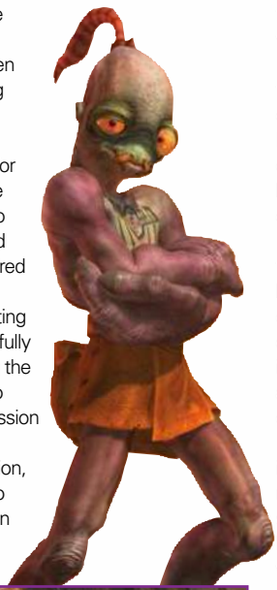
But this instalment was the first time *Oddworld* was rendered in three dimensions. "At the time, everyone was enamoured with 3D and the gaming press was speaking of 3D as the only viable way," Lorne recalls. "It was sad to see all the genres being left behind because they weren't using new chipsets. Regardless, if you wanted to keep getting funded, you needed to stay with the chipsets and where the audience interests were heading, and by the time we got to the Xbox it was all about 3D otherwise you probably weren't getting funded."

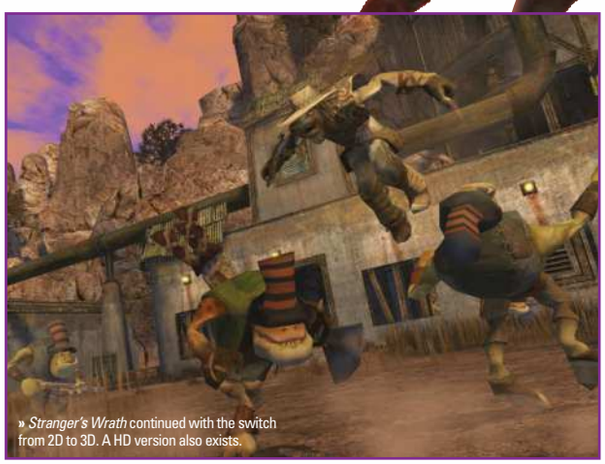
The added dimension was a challenge to capture what made Abe special in his awkwardness and abilities, yet have that embedded in a free roaming space. There was also a huge real-time 3D learning curve that all of the team was going through. But they made the most of the situation and, with players not only playing Abe but Munch too, the game could enter fresh waters.

> "We always wanted empathy to be a major factor in the game"
>
> Lorne Lanning

"We needed the ability to swap between characters while also dealing with targeting in possession," says Lorne. "In the *Abe* games, they were 2D and so possession was proximity auto-targeting. It was easy for the user to understand who they would be possessing. Once we entered 3D, the auto nature of it needed to change as depth and dimension added new dynamics and required new accuracies to offer the player."

He said it was a case of the player wanting to possess "that Slig over there, not; hopefully that one over there but we'll see what Slig the game chooses for us. That wasn't going to work," he explains, "so we needed possession to be targetable and, being in a 3D world, targeting was as easy as character navigation, so we used the same navigation abilities to control your possession orb. You could then navigate to nail your target."





» *Stranger's Wrath* continued with the switch from 2D to 3D. A HD version also exists.

The reviews were not as favourable for *Munch's Oddysee*, with some believing the puzzles lacked variation. Lorne has no complaints. "I always felt all of our puzzles were not varied enough, but these are challenges with puzzle games and the amount of code we were writing for each puzzle," he confesses. "Puzzle games are not very economical with code. Combine that with development environments that were unpredictable in terms of budgeting, and you found yourself in tight spots making lots of compromises."

The fourth game, *Stranger's Wrath*, however, was a superb return to form. Released in January 2005 in America, it was critically acclaimed. It had first and third-person perspectives and was also faster. The team wanted speed to be a factor in the third-person in particular, due to the character's nature and ability to run faster. Stranger could become a ramming melee fighter at higher speeds and, by increasing in speed, his motion ability morphed into a motorcycle mode. He didn't, as Lorne explains, "pivot on a dime with speed". He steered and leaned into turns and it allowed for him to run much faster and feel more like a vehicle when controlled.

"This allowed us to have more 'retreat for higher ground' ability if you were getting overwhelmed in a combat situation," says Lorne. "Now you could retreat, and with enough speed to get past getting shot in the back – something I felt was very much missing out there for character-driven combat games."

Stranger's Wrath had an element of stealth, too. It remained true to the character's nature but also compounded the chemistry of choices that players were able to have at their disposal. It offered the gamer more choices in how to solve any combat situation. But another decision was made: *Stranger's Wrath* contained role-playing elements.

"Action-adventure games seemed inevitably heading toward a role-playing model, at least at an accounting level," says Lorne. "If the game was going to have a persistent economy, and one that your character needed to pursue in the narrative, then it needed to incorporate more modification and purchasability for the main character. Having this inherent in a system gives you many more things that you can make the gamer do for various reasons at

» The live ammo in *Stranger's Wrath* was brilliant.

THE NEW KEEPER OF ODDWORLD

Five years after Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath, the series was given a dust down by developer Just Add Water. We talk to founder and CEO Stewart Gilray about the HD remakes

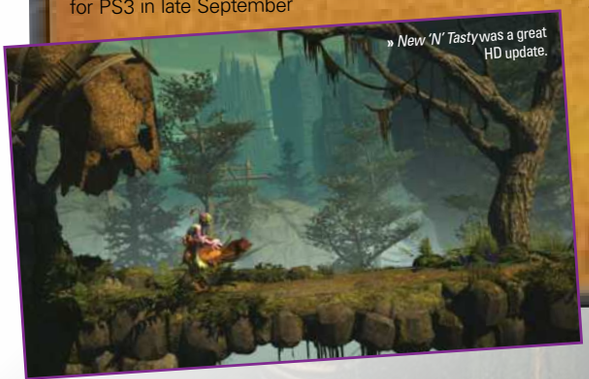
You began working on the *Oddworld* franchise in May 2010. Were you a fan of the series and how did you get involved?
I'd met Lorne briefly at GDC 2009. He was one of my industry icon legends and someone I'd always wanted to meet. Over the years I'd been asking a mutual friend to persuade Lorne to go back to doing a 2D-type game but with 3D assets – a remake of *Abe's Oddysee* or a game of a similar nature – but in June 2009, Lorne and I started exchanging emails. We spent the next nine months talking about various things and then he asked if Just Add Water could help them out as they'd been let down by another developer. He wanted us to look at *Stranger's Wrath* for the PC and I said yes, as long as we could do a PS3 version. We began to work on *Stranger HD* for PS3 in late September 2009 while still working on the initial PC release of *Stranger,* which was a straight port from Xbox.

By the time of your involvement, the series had been stagnant for four years. Were there discussions about moving the series on?
There were no real discussions. It was a case of 'let's do this project, and see where it leads to', and we've now released the initial PC release of *Stranger's Wrath*, three versions of *Stranger's Wrath HD*, two versions of *Munch's Oddysee HD* and we're working on the multi-platform remake of *Abe's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty.* We only had two staff when we began the initial version but we have 16 now. The plan is we will continue and work on some proper new projects. We're going through a re-structure at the moment that will help that become a reality.

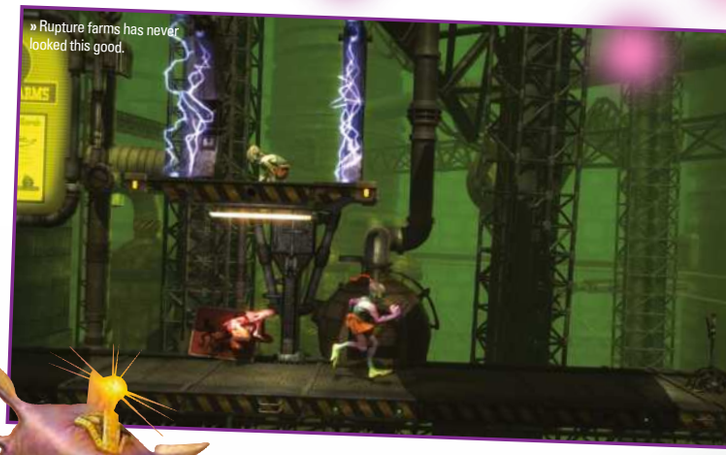
There were promises of *SligStorm, Fangus Klot, Squeek's Oddysee* and some other games. What was happening and why were these games not getting off the ground?
When the original studio was closed in April 2005, it was because Lorne and Sherry McKenna had decided enough was enough working with publishers. The primary reason was the difficulty of working on a triple-A title with budgets north of $15m, especially if you're only seeing a small return rate due to publisher/developer agreements the way they were back then. *Fangus Klot* was in development when that happened, so that was the main victim of what happened then. Lorne had been working on the story and design for *Squeek's Oddysee* as well, but couldn't solve a problem he had with it so it kept getting put on the back burner until that thing was solved. And *SligStorm* just didn't happen mainly due to working on *Munch's Oddysee.*

What makes *Oddworld* such a special series of games?
This is pretty easy actually: character, story, the world, craziness but most importantly the humour.

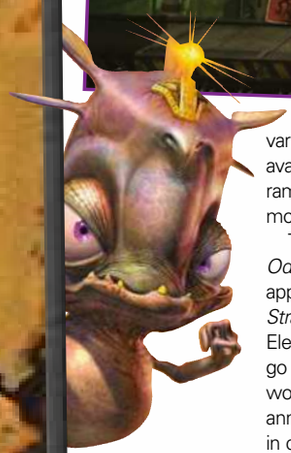
Is there still a place for 2D gaming in the modern era?
Why not? I think both pure 2D art and 3D art with 2D gameplay can still work very well, and we're showing that with *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty.* I think this need for everything to be in 3D isn't always the right thing to do; there are better solutions if the design requires it.



» *New 'N' Tasty* was a great HD update.



» Rupture farms has never looked this good.



various times, all of which are added tools available to the designers that help overall ramping while helping to decrease a potential monotony that can come with a game."

The fourth game became the last *Oddworld* title and the fifth game did not appear, cutting short the original quintology. *Stranger's Wrath* had been published by Electronic Arts and, while Lorne doesn't go too deep, he says, "Our experience working with the last publisher pretty much annihilated any desire we might have had left in continuing to work with big publishers," which points to a potential issue.

Plans for other games came and went. Names such as *Oddworld: The Hand Of Odd*, *SligStorm*, *The Brutal Ballad Of Fangas Klot*, *Oddworld: Squeek's Oddysee*, *Oddworld: Munch's Exoddus* and *Oddworld: Slave Circus* were put forward over the years. And while a game may well have surfaced around 2008, the Western financial crisis and work on a new project called *Citizen Siege* caused a distraction.

Remakes and digital content appear to be the way forward for now, and the *Oddworld* franchise is being built organically and without financing. But it means that the team cannot spend in the way it did, and it will take a while before triple-A contemporary content is released. "We've talked about a number of games but that was probably a mistake," says Lorne. "It's something I won't be doing until I know they are paid for."

It seems the appetite is still there, however. "We're very grateful for the way things have worked out but, like a lot of artists, we're always wanting to do better," he says, and we pray to hear Abe's farts in a new game sooner rather than later. ✱

» Just Add Water has put a lot of care and attention into its HD remake.

GAME CHANGERS

METAL GEAR SOLID

RELEASED: 1998 (JAPAN, US), 1999 (UK) **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI **DEVELOPER:** KCEJ **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION

Kojima created the modern stealth genre with this influential cyber thriller, as well as introducing the iconic Solid Snake to audiences worldwide…

Metal Gear Solid has sold 6 million copies, which was surpassed by Metal Gear Solid 2's 7 million when it was released back in 2001.

Kojima's 3D translation of his MSX *Metal Gear* series was a landmark game due to its details and depth. You can see this in the way it was initially promoted during E3 1997: displays of Snake blowing up guards with about 20 consecutive C4 bombs, figuring out snowy land masses through the scope and machine-gunning an invisible cyborg ninja while office debris flies through the air. It's this extra dimension to design that makes *Metal Gear Solid* such a significant part of the history of our medium – this was the birth of the modern stealth genre in all its details, all its possibilities in approaching situations however you liked.

For many players, *Metal Gear Solid* was a shock to the system in that Snake's shooting and basic action abilities were just alternative paths in the game – instead, sneaking around was the point. Stealth is something players had to mentally adjust to. That first scenario, when Snake is waiting for the elevator after crawling out of the water, is a brilliantly disguised tutorial. Approach it with open fists and you realise that enemies don't die after they're knocked over. You have no guns, and once the alarm goes off, that's pretty much it for you.

Then you learn to be quiet. You learn how to choke enemies without accidentally throwing them with the square button, you learn not to tread through the water on your way past guards and, crucially, you learn to wait. And, once you've grasped these fundamentals, you get good at everything else in *Metal Gear Solid*, too, including the combat. Understanding how to use everything in Snake's inventory, like the scope, claymore mines and rations enables you to look at every environment laterally, like a puzzle with many solutions, and be rewarded by the intricacy of the way you tackle the situation.

THE STORY OF MGS: IN BRIEF

WE ENDEAVOUR TO SUM UP KOJIMA'S CRAZY SERIES

METAL GEAR SOLID

★ Big Boss clone Solid Snake is sent to stop Liquid, who's holding the US hostage. Snake tries to rescue people from Liquid's FOXHOUND unit but they die. Snake eliminates FOXHOUND one-by-one, saves Meryl and Otacon, destroys the robot Metal Gear then beats Liquid.

METAL GEAR SOLID 2

★ Snake finds out the US has built a Metal Gear, which Ocelot steals. Jump forward, and Raiden is looking to stop Solidus Snake. The game has been an attempt by the Patriots to recreate the circumstances of Shadow Moses with Raiden in place of Snake.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3

★ Big Boss (Naked Snake) is dispatched to rescue a scientist. His mentor, The Boss, betrays him and defects to the USSR. Snake is sent to kill her, before the truth about the manipulation of The Boss and betrayal by love interest EVA lead to the greatest videogame ending of all time.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

★Snake is old. The world is the subject of a war economy controlled by Liquid Ocelot and presided over by the Patriots. Raiden is a robot ninja. Big Boss turns up. Meryl marries Johnny Sasaki. Raiden's child is the Milkybar Kid. The ending is too long. Snake wins and has an iPod.

METAL GEAR SOLID V

★Kojima's last and, arguably, best *Metal Gear Solid*, *V* is made up of *Ground Zeroes* and *The Phantom Pain*, and transports us back to before the original *Metal Gear*. More mental storylines and truly open-world experiences for both new and old *MGS* fans.

It's still arguably Kojima's most engaging piece of work, on a par with *MGS3* and far outstripping *Sons Of Liberty* as well as, to a lesser extent, *Guns Of The Patriots*. Each *Metal Gear Solid* game is an escalating journey from A to B, fraught with the madness of a gauntlet of boss fights along the way, increasingly bizarre environments and the promise of an unpredictable climax. *Metal Gear*'s boss fights are the best in the field, frankly. In *MGS*, Kojima took the time to underline the menace of each one.

They all have their own angle on insanity; Revolver Ocelot opts for a gun duel in a close-quarters C4 trap, Psycho Mantis infiltrates the mind of love interest Meryl and puts a gun against her head to manipulate Snake, Gray Fox brutally murders soldiers at random,

> **"It's still Kojima's most engaging piece of work, on a par with metal gear solid 3"**

Vulcan Raven cruises around in a tank and Sniper Wolf spends entire days picking out her targets. Then there's the main villain: Liquid Snake. A clone of Big Boss like Solid Snake himself and therefore his genetic equal, despite having an inexplicable bizarre British-American accent and a blonde mullet. They're innovative in appearance, thanks to Yoji Shinkawa's character designs, as well as grotesquely charismatic in their portrayal.

They're the main event in *Metal Gear Solid*, each framed with this mythical feeling of threat, like each comes preloaded with their own torrid histories that have shaped them into these chaotic figures. They all feel like they belong in Shadow Moses, this foreign-feeling icy kingdom of madness. It's become tiresomely popular to slate Hideo Kojima's use of cut-scenes, but the way bosses are presented in *MGS* is convincingly cinematic, right down to their names appearing on-screen with the actor's in brackets.

And that's the other component of *Metal Gear Solid*'s DNA, the one that is often knocked and rarely applauded when it's good: the influence of cinema. Yes, it's full of cut-scenes, but the vast majority are good cut-scenes, elevated by a fairly well-translated script and a superb voice cast who were far and above the industry standard at the climax of the CD-ROM age. The story was full of silly bits but there was conviction in the way it was presented, with David Hayter's dramatic gruff interpretation of Snake making him one of the first videogame characters to instantly be known on voice alone.

KEY FACTS

- ***Metal Gear Solid*** **topped the United Kingdom charts for eight weeks when it was originally released in 1999, which was a record at the time.**
- **One of the only games in the series to get a PC port – and actually quite a good one – *Metal Gear* found its way to Windows in late 2000 and works on Windows 7, though it's not available on Steam or GOG.**
- ***Metal Gear Solid*** **was remade as *The Twin Snakes* in 2003 by Silicon Knights, but the developer fluffed it a bit by changing the music and rerecording the voice acting. But it did look nice.**

Just like the stealth mechanics, this cinematic presentation felt new to people. That Kojima handled it so well was expected after such a broad sweep of hype prior to the game's release, and the narrative became intrinsic to the reveal of whatever challenges the player would face next, including the aforementioned bosses. It was by no means the first title to achieve this (Westwood's *Blade Runner* was perhaps even more revolutionary with mo-cap in 1997), but for many of the six million gamers who hadn't seen videogames convincingly brush with motion pictures, this would be a watershed moment.

That's just one part of why *Metal Gear Solid* holds up today, in fact, much better than its flawed successor, bogged down as it is by adolescent conspiracy nonsense and a truncated narrative. The rebirth of the stealth genre prompted by *MGS*, a feat shared with *Thief: The Dark Project*, led to the rise (and eventual fall) of *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear*'s own progression in its later instalments, as well as the proliferation of this genre's mechanics in every game from *GTA* to *Tomb Raider*. Hideo Kojima, meanwhile, became one of the industry's leading lights and the kind of public figure where people would pay attention to absolutely everything he had to say. *Metal Gear Solid* is a worthy success story, a game that remains very easy to fall in love with. ✱

GAME CHANGERS

TEN EXAMPLES OF MAD GENIUS IN METAL GEAR SOLID

Those moments and ideas that defined Kojima's PlayStation original, for better or worse

"NEITHER ENEMY NOR FRIEND"

■ The depiction of Gray Fox, Snake's former ally turned resuscitated villain (then ally again) Frank Jaeger is one of the more interesting parts of the game's story due to the character's moral ambiguity, connections to Snake, horrific murder of soldiers in a corridor and redemptive finale. Yoji Shinkawa's skeletal design of this cyborg ninja is one of the most iconic created for a videogame.

MERYL – LOVE INTEREST OR NOT?

■ Meryl was the token love interest who played the most bizarre role in the story – just why was she in Shadow Moses to begin with? Based on a character of the same name and appearance from Kojima's earlier title Snatcher, which came out more than a decade before *MGS*, Meryl flirts a bit with Snake, but her eventual fate in *Metal Gear Solid 4* sort of implies it was only ever a deepened friendship.

OTACON AND SNAKE'S FRIENDSHIP

■ Snake's odd relationship with Otacon is one of the unusual highlights of *Metal Gear Solid*: super soldier meets otaku, and what is at first a useful alliance soon turns into a lifelong friendship. Snake's interactions with his allies are all pretty entertaining in *Metal Gear Solid*, yet Otacon brings out a lighter side of Snake that really helps differentiate him from forgettable one-note videogame action heroes.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS, VIA TORTURE

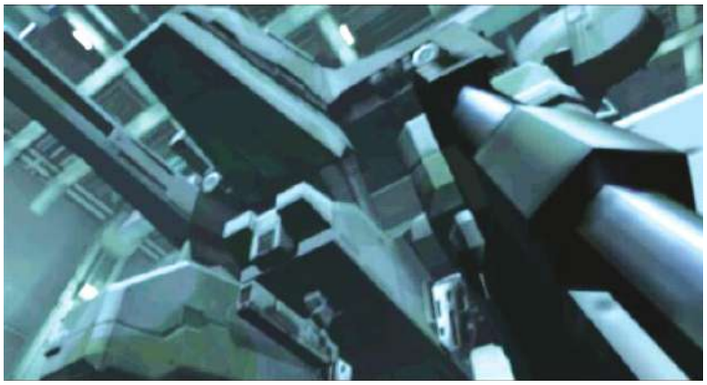
■ A forward-looking idea, failing to resist Revolver Ocelot's torture at around the game's mid-point results in the actually quite nasty consequence of Meryl's death, which changes the ending to Snake escaping Shadow Moses with Otacon instead of Meryl. Multiple endings wouldn't be revisited in subsequent entries despite the success of the idea in *MGS* – so just what was Kojima thinking?

"YOU'VE GOT A GREAT BUTT"

■ A ludicrous and cheeky bit of vague sexism from Snake that represents the scripting problems of *Metal Gear Solid*, which are about as numerous as its successes. This Eighties action movie bit of trash dialogue is about as bad as it gets, and given that Snake himself was generally pretty respectful to female characters in the sequels, this was a one-off.

BACK OF THE CD CASE

■ Everyone knows this one and every outlet in history has referenced it to the point of *FFVII/Aeris'* death nightmare fatigue, so it's barely worth talking about. Instead we'll share an anecdote: one writer on this bookazine fell foul of the CD case codec idea by playing a pirated version owned by their cousin, using a bad photocopy to work it out. Piracy never wins, kids.



METAL GEAR ITSELF

■ The beauty of the *Metal Gear* franchise is that, while primarily about the idea of war, espionage and military action, the imagery of the franchise is anything but boring realism. *Metal Gear REX* is a walking nuclear robot – it's a mech by any other name, pretty much, and as was the case in *Metal Gear* and subsequent games in the series, this is a tenet of the franchise.

THE FINAL BATTLE IS A FISTFIGHT

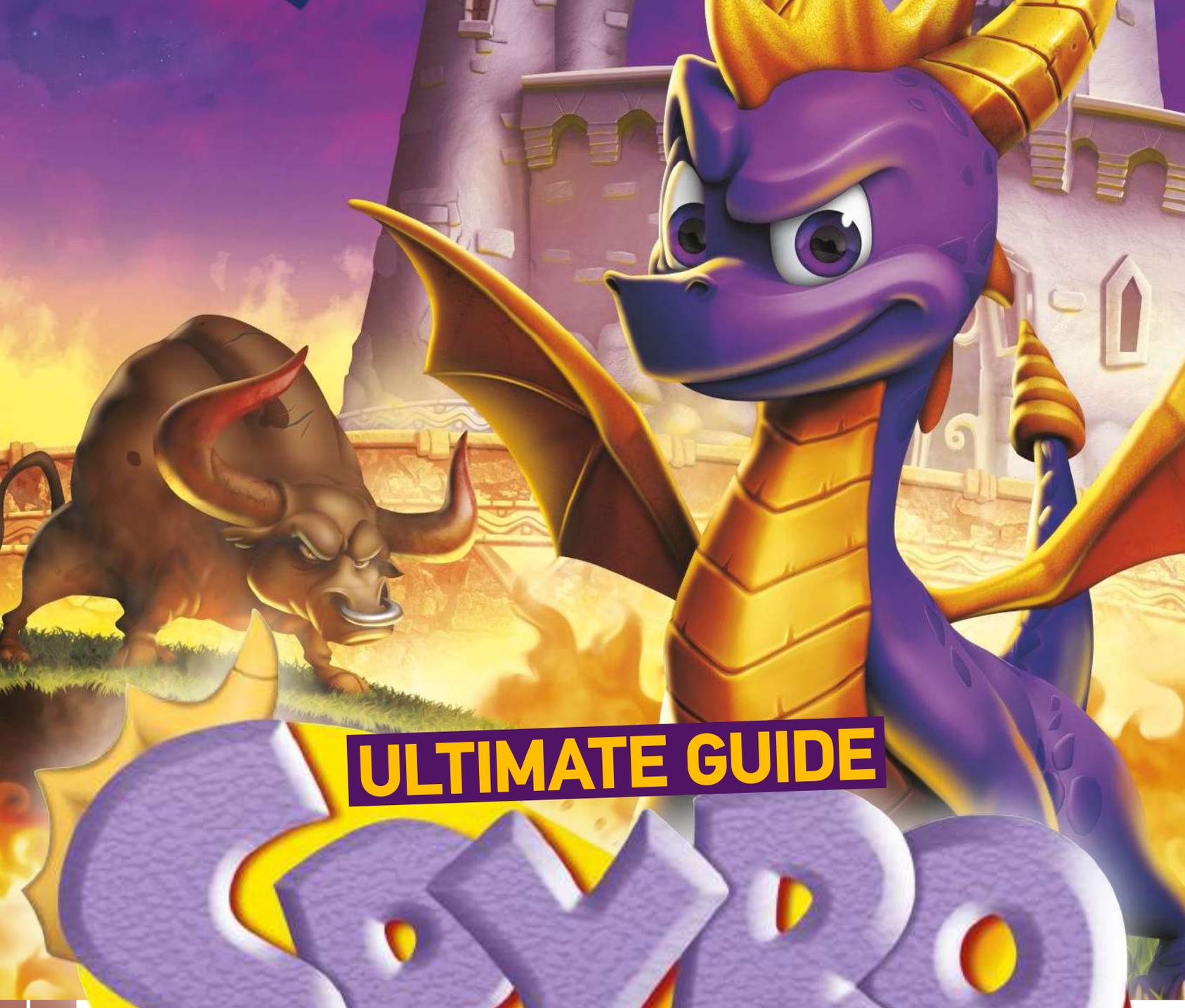
■ Despite solid Snake being armed to the teeth with all the Stinger and Nikita missiles he'll ever need, the last encounter with Liquid Snake, on top of *Metal Gear REX*, is an elaborate pub fight – a winning creative choice. The designers know it's more intimate, a raw way to determine the outcome of the story, for players to really feel like Snake earns his superiority in the most cathartic way possible.

PSYCHO MANTIS

■ Like the CD case idea, this has been discussed to death, so let's focus on the portrayal of Mantis himself. The black skeletal vest, the scorched-looking skin, the gas mask and the strained delivery of his dialogue – this is as close to a horror villain that *MGS* has, a puppet master who manipulates Meryl's actions and makes the player feel more helpless than they would against a bipedal nuclear robot.

SNIPER WOLF

■ Cataclysmic melodrama as Otacon mourns the death of a boss who tore a bullet through Meryl's stomach and therefore made you backtrack to almost the start of the game. Otacon's blubbing is the worst offender for cut-scene nonsense, though the gigantic field setting of the battle is fantastic, and returning to it in *Guns Of The Patriots* to fight Crying Wolf was a real treat.



ULTIMATE GUIDE

SPYRO THE DRAGON

Blazing after the trail set by Naughty Dog's Bandicoot came this adolescent purple dragon. Spyro The Dragon was a smash success, but what was it that made the game such a firestarter?

Words by Adam Barnes

The concept of the third dimension understandably doesn't seem so alien to us nowadays. While it's come full circle and now pixel art is seeing a resurgence in seemingly every other new indie game released on Steam, back when the PlayStation was causing a ruckus it was 3D graphics that was all anyone could talk about. Genres were being torn from their traditional, two-dimensional perspectives and thrust into the black fog of early 3D. Almost overnight, gaming had once again become a frontier, and inventive ways of gaming were being adopted and adapted with practically every new release. While Spyro wasn't the spark that caused the explosion, the fiery character certainly helped keep it ablaze after the likes of *Super Mario 64* and *Crash Bandicoot* had already begun to popularise the concept of the 3D platformer.

In fact, there are close ties between Naughty Dog's destructive orange mascot and that of Insomniac Games' purple equivalent. It began with *Disruptor*, an impressive, if overlooked, cinematic shooter developed by Insomniac. Though it hadn't sold well, publisher Universal – which had also worked with Naughty Dog on *Crash Bandicoot* – was impressed enough to go ahead and commission a second game from the young studio. The focus on dragons for the next game was there from the very start thanks to studio artist Craig Stitt and his fondness for the mythical winged lizards. The ability to fly was a big boon for the game, since it added a whole extra layer to the 3D platformer genre ▶

"While Spyro wasn't the spark that caused the explosion, the fiery character helped keep it ablaze"

Remastering Spyro

Toys For Bob's design director, Toby Schadt on resurrecting Spyro's first three games

Why have you decided to focus on the original PlayStation games?

Because it's the classic trilogy that started it all! There are a variety of reasons as to why now is the right time to remaster the first three *Spyro* games, but the most important is the fans. The love and appreciation for Spyro hasn't gone away, and we wanted to create a love letter back to the fans with this remaster that unleashed the dragon in a significant way.

What technical challenges have you faced?

The team didn't have any of the code from the original games, which of course presented a challenge. To get around this, we built a tool dubbed 'Spyro-scope' that helped the team to map the original games to allow us to rebuild the remaster from the ground up. This means that each level in *Spyro Reignited Trilogy* is mapped faithfully from the originals. The characters are creatively reimagined with additional flair allowing fans to rekindle the fire with Spyro and his crew like never before.

Is there anything you've had to update from a gameplay mechanics point of view?

Because we wanted to create a love letter back to the fans that reminds them why they fell in love with gaming in the first place, we focused our efforts on a few key areas of the trilogy. First, the controls: fans will experience the iconic platformer with smooth controls and modern flourishes that will enhance the exploration, collection and discovery. Core elements as fundamental as controllers have changed so much since the PlayStation days, so we wanted to honour the original experiences while making the gameplay feel natural in today's gaming landscape. Then graphics, which we wanted to recapture the stunning, lush, and fiery environments. And lastly the experience: the *Reignited Trilogy* captures that same adventure and wonder of the original three games and goes beyond what fans remember with remastered environments, characters and musical score!

What's it like working with the voice actors?

Fantastic! It's been great to work with them, and fans of the *Spyro* games may recognise some familiar voices such as Tom Kenny, the original voice actor in *Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage* and *Spyro: Year of the Dragon*. He's back as the voice of Spyro in the *Spyro Reignited Trilogy*.

Our readers crave physical releases. Why are the second two games in the trilogy digital-only?

The development team has put incredible care and effort into the game to make sure it not only lives up to fans' expectations but also to their own incredibly high standards. Each of the games in *Spyro Reignited Trilogy* has dozens of expansive levels. A day one patch is needed for those who have purchased the trilogy via the physical disc. From a development standpoint, all 100-plus levels and 400-plus characters in *Spyro Reignited Trilogy* were hand-crafted and built from the ground up.

Does working on other people's games feel restrictive in what you can and cannot change?

When Toys For Bob set out to make an awesome game collection, there were certain design decisions that needed to be made throughout the process. The team remained committed to keeping the integrity and legacy of *Spyro* that fans remembered intact. Toys For Bob's goal was to ensure that the Spyro in *Spyro Reignited Trilogy* remained faithful to the Spyro that fans remember when they first fell in love with the franchise. The studio leveraged in-house *Spyro* aficionados to ensure key details from the original games were faithfully implemented into *Spyro Reignited Trilogy*.

» Each of the worlds had their own aesthetic and purposefully avoided familiar level tropes like 'ice world' or 'fire world'.

▶ that didn't really exist previously. Just think of Mario's winged cap in *Super Mario 64* and how that brief burst of three-dimensional freedom just felt so thrilling. Spyro would have that freedom permanently and would be designed with flight in mind.

But in fact the initial style of the game was completely different. Despite the desire to create something more lighthearted than *Disruptor* – hence the push for a dragon – the look of this platformer still leaned closer towards dark and gritty. The inspiration, in fact, was 1996 flash-in-the-pan movie *DragonHeart*, with Insomniac wanting to capture a similarly sombre approach to fantasy. Spyro was initially to be named Pete – as hard as that might be to imagine – a comically pedestrian name, and one associated with a 1977 movie, that may well have been intended to be taken seriously but was supposed to be a mythical *dragon* and all that entails. The change came about fairly early on in development, with guidance from Mark Cerny – who was then working at Universal Interactive – to change direction to something more family friendly. The reasons were many, but primarily it was to target a younger demographic in a bid to take a slice out of Nintendo's domination. Mark never quite forced the change, but was eager to see Insomniac switch tact after noticing that the PlayStation was targeting an older audience than the N64, and that the space for a high-quality family friendly game was waiting to be filled. Pete became Spyro and a more colourful, Disneylike tone was adopted.

Mark's input didn't stop there, though. The executive producer had the idea for a panoramic 3D engine, essentially meaning large open environments that didn't suffer from the same dark fog that so many PlayStation games did. It was up to Insomniac's Alex Hastings to make this dream happen, however, who resorted to assembly language – which was rarely used, even at the time – for the majority of the coding. And in fact *Spyro*'s engine would become quite inventive, essentially using two separate engines: one to render the distance in lower polygonal quality and

» A subtle, but brilliant, addition to the engine was how even if a gem wasn't rendered in the distance, its glimmer could still be seen to entice the player.

one to render the closer spaces in much better detail, transitioning between the two seamlessly as and when they were needed. Nowadays this is a common technique to maximise visual fidelity, and back then Insomniac was something of a pioneer with this tech. This engine would become an integral part of the game's design and would allow players to see far into the distance a help to ascertain the gaps that they were looking to glide across. Without this engine powering the game, *Spyro The Dragon* would have had to be a different experience entirely; there would have been no option for floating islands with secret treasure or long distances to traverse as part of platforming. Even the bright, cheery tone would've felt more oppressive and grim if it had suffered the same dark fog of early 3D and likely not have become the popular PlayStation mascot it ultimately ended up being.

Of course this would have all been for nothing if the character of Spyro couldn't match the qualities of the environments. For that, Charles Zembillas took control of the initial design, brought on because ▶

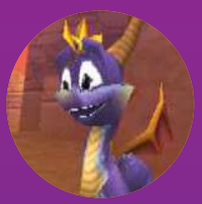
"Spyro's engine would become quite inventive, essentially using two separate engines"

SPYRO THE DRAGON

Meet the cast

The colourful creatures you will meet around the Dragon Realms

SPYRO

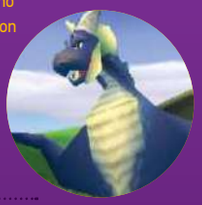


Feisty and fiery, Spyro has just enough attitude to make him likeable, but the right amount of heart to become the hero. He's young, too, which means he's not quite the powerful dragon that he could grow up to be.

SPARX

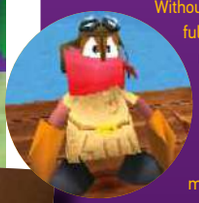
Tagging along with Spyro, the two became close friends after the purple dragon rescued Sparx from a bird. The dragonfly has a fondness for butterflies, but also protects Spyro from harm - essentially acting as a life meter.

LINDAR



You could say that it was Lindar who caused all the dragons in the Dragon Realms to be turned to statues, since his interview with DNN – Dragon News Network – in the opening taunted the game's villain by saying he was "no threat", and that he was "ugly".

THE BALLOONISTS

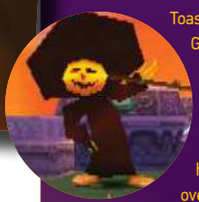


Without the wingspan of a full-grown dragon, Spyro can't do much more than glide. As such, he should rely on the various balloonists of the world who can take him to different homeworlds – once certain requirements are met, of course.

THE DRAGONS

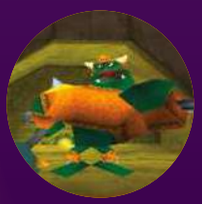
There are 74 different dragons to be rescued throughout the game (with six of them being rescued twice, actually), each offering either a pearl of wisdom to help the player understand the game's abilities, or just an opportunity for Spyro to talk smack to his elders.

TOASTY



Toasty is said to be one of Gnasty Gnorc's most devious henchmen. The truth is, however, it's just a sheep in a contraption, likely exacting revenge for the punishment the fluffy livestock have had to endure from dragons over the years.

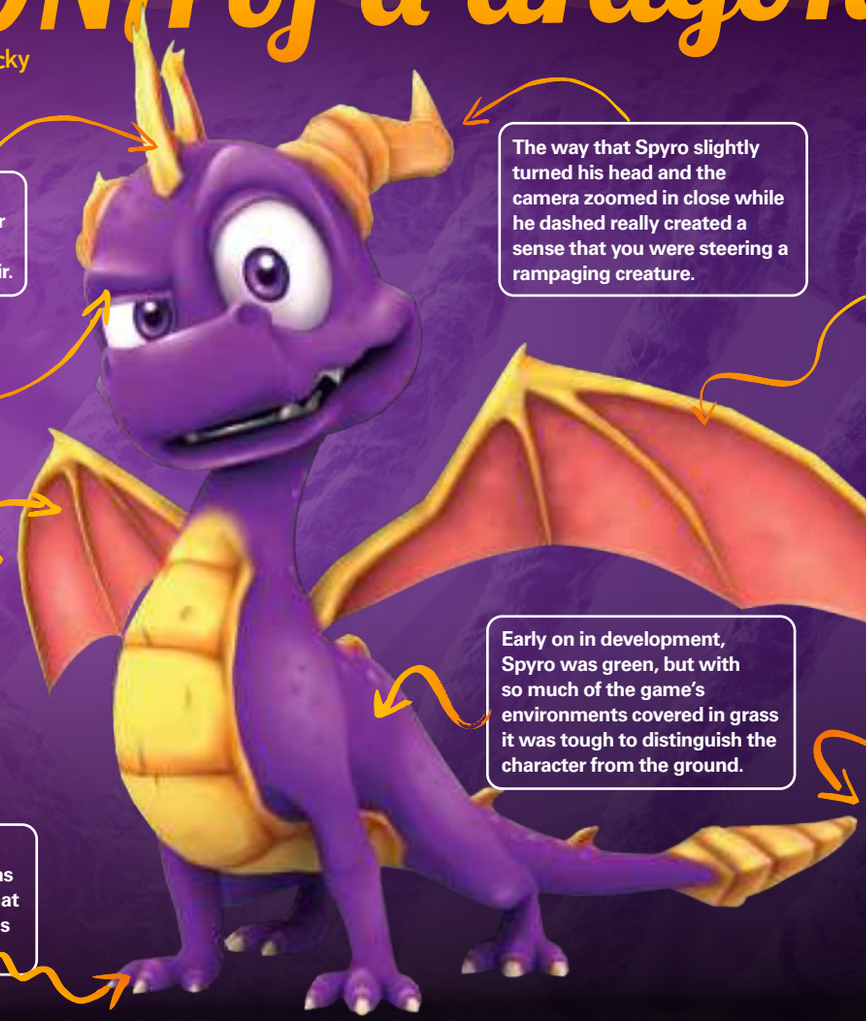
GNASTY GNORC



The game's villain. Gnasty Gnorc was exiled after he tried to steal the dragons' treasure. He then enacted a plot to exterminate the dragons – which he would've gotten away with, too, if it wasn't for that pesky Spyro.

The DNA of a dragon

What elements went into the plucky young dragon that made him an enduring success?



This tuft of horns is a great design choice, almost as though the designer had styled them as a fauxhawk – just like any teenager would with their hair.

A great deal of time was spent on animating Spyro, with his raising and lowering eyebrows in particular helping to give him that cartoonlike feel.

The ability to breathe fire was always going to be a part of Spyro's draconic skillset, but it became such an iconic feature of the character.

Dashing was another innate ability of Spyro's, one that was enhanced in certain stages that allowed him to burst forwards at incredible speeds.

The way that Spyro slightly turned his head and the camera zoomed in close while he dashed really created a sense that you were steering a rampaging creature.

The unlimited, unrestricted freedom to glide as part of an inherent character moveset was a first for the 3D platformer, a necessity when the main character is a dragon.

Early on in development, Spyro was green, but with so much of the game's environments covered in grass it was tough to distinguish the character from the ground.

Naturally, you'll most commonly see Spyro from the back, so the added details from this view - the tip of the tail, the undulating scales – make him just as interesting to look at.

» In 2011 Spyro headlined a new game called *Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure*, which featured cute toys figurines that could then be used in the game.

▶ of his work creating the look of *Crash Bandicoot* – Naughty Dog and Insomniac were both close developers, physically and socially. This was how the Disneyesque look was formed, with Charles' concepts used to define both the appearance of Spyro and his various cohorts, but also the animations the characters used to express that cartoony vibe. It was Kirsten Van Schreven that would take control of the design of the different worlds, however, and she saw fit to shake up the tried-and-true formats that platformers usually came with at the time. Gone were the concepts of the snow stage, the desert stage, or the jungle stage, and instead a much more original style that was all the more mystical and in keeping with the fantasy theme was implimented. The starting world of Artisans, for example, was a fairytale landscape, while the second zone, Peace Keepers, provided a more battleworn environment. It was unique, and only helped Spyro stand out all the more.

But more than that, *Spyro The Dragon* shunned traditional stage-by-stage platforming gameplay in favour of something more akin to *Super Mario 64*'s level of choice. Rather than leaping into pictures, however, Spyro would travel through a warpgate – with a neat effect of seeing a 2D plane projecting the skyline of the destination – to travel without noticeable loading screens to individual stages. The openness of its gameplay was unlike anything seen on the PlayStation before and considering the technical stresses that ensued from this, Insomniac certainly didn't take the easy way out with *Spyro The Dragon*.

But then this was a developer looking to prove itself. *Disruptor* had been a 'successful' failure, proving the technical skills of the studio but struggling to garner any commercial acknowledgement for it. *Spyro*, conversely, was met with immediate positivity, releasing in 1998 to praise from most publications, a top-tier position in the sales chart (just below *Tomb Raider*, as it happens) and a space in the gaming mascots hall of fame. Ultimately going on to sell almost 5 million copies across the lifetime of the PlayStation, the character might have looked like just any another platforming mascot, but few games have had the lasting appeal of the purple dragon. And while Insomniac Games has since outgrown the series, the demand to see them back in the driving seat of the franchise never really went away. Perhaps if Spyro's revitalised new look turns out to be a winner, that's something that fans might just get to see. ✱

» While the original didn't put as much emphasis on story, you still got a sense of the young, cheeky Spyro.

» Some stages allowed Spyro to take flight. They were fun distractions, and compelling to gamers looking to 100% the game.

Dragon's Age

From young dragonling to aging platform mascot, Spyro's lived a long life...

SPYRO 2: GATEWAY TO GLIMMER/RIPTO'S RAGE

Riding on the success of the original meant Insomniac had cause to polish the weaker aspects with this 1999 sequel. The overall design remained mostly the same, but with a greater emphasis on story and characters that was admittedly lacking in the previous game.

SPYRO: YEAR OF THE DRAGON

The third and final of the original PlayStation trilogy released in 2000 was also Insomniac's last of the franchise before the studio moved on to new projects. It brought with it a heap of new mechanics, key among them being the ability to play as different characters.

SPYRO: SEASON OF ICE

With the success of a Spyro trilogy firmly established on home consoles, Universal saw fit to push the teen dragon a little further, handing the reins to new series developer Digital Eclipse and transitioning the series over to a handheld system for the first time. *Season Of Ice* released in 2001 on the Game Boy Advance.

SPYRO 2: SEASON OF FLAME

Following up in 2002 was the obviously-titled GBA sequel, *Season Of Flame*. The game leveraged the same isometric viewpoint and was critically well received. Though it didn't sell quite as well as its predecessor, the two were fairly popular – selling a combined 1.5 million copies.

SPYRO: ENTER THE DRAGONFLY

2002 also saw the release of the first console *Spyro* not restricted to a Sony platform. Released on GameCube and PS2, Check Six Studios and Equinox Digital were pressured to release a game in time for Christmas, and the move to new tech meant it suffered from a lot of flaws.

SPYRO: ATTACK OF THE RHYNOCS

This was the third of the GBA trilogy, releasing in 2003, and again developed by Digital Ecplise. It followed the same template as the original two GBA games with the same isometric viewpoint, but it was the last *Spyro* game to be released under the Universal brand.

SPYRO ORANGE: THE CORTEX CONSPIRACY

Crash Bandicoot and *Spyro* had enjoyed a friendly rivalry – Naughty Dog and Insomniac would play each other's games. This culminated in another GBA *Spyro* game, a crossover title released in 2004 that featured Crash's nemesis Neo Cortex as the main antagonist for Spyro.

SPYRO: A HERO'S TAIL

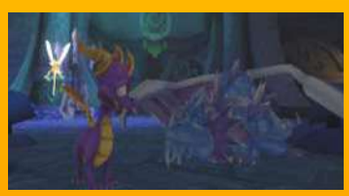
Developer Eurocom – which had already developed PS2 and GameCube games for *Crash Bandicoot* – was brought on board with this 2004 release. It leveraged the open world nature of the series by adding in slight *Metroid*-like progression, requiring backtracking in a manner far beyond the hunting for hidden gems.

SPYRO: SHADOW LEGACY

Despite releasing only on Nintendo DS in 2005, this game takes place after the events of *A Hero's Tail*. Developer Amaze Entertainment leveraged the touchscreen capabilities of the DS handheld by empowering Spyro with spells, which were activated by drawing the necessary symbol on the console's bottom screen.

THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: A NEW BEGINNING

This 2006 entry was the start of a supposed reboot – a new trilogy for the franchise with Krome Entertainment at the helm. This was more combat-oriented than any other game in the series and featured Gary Oldman and Elijah Wood as voice actors.



THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: THE ETERNAL NIGHT

Futurama's Billy West replaced David Spade as the voice of Sparx, but it was otherwise business as usual for the second part of Krome's new trilogy. Interestingly, the GBA game (by Amaze Entertainment) is a standalone 2D adventure with *Metroid* influences and a solid combat engine.

THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: DAWN OF THE DRAGON

Though the new trilogy offered a sense of growth to Spyro as a character – here he was a teenager – none of this improved the quality of the game. Despite this clever concept of having Spyro grow throughout the three games, the reception of these titles saw the end of the core *Spyro* games.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

A precursor to the Jackass generation headlined by an upcoming sports icon, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater not only heralded a new type of videogame genre but signalled the arrival of an entire culture. Looking back at where it all began, Neversoft co-founder Mick West discusses the humble origins of one of the biggest franchises of all time

» Neversoft didn't completely abandon the idea of linear downhill courses. Two of the main stages – Mall and Downhill Jam – retain the original concept inspired by Sega's *Top Skater.*

In 1999, while publisher Activision was circling the idea of an extreme sports title, pro skaterboarder Tony Hawk was peering over the edge of a half-pipe at the X-Games tournament in San Francisco, bracing himself as he prepared to attempt one of the sport's most complicated tricks: the 900. An aerial spin involving two-and-a-half turns, this was considered skateboarding's Holy Grail at the time, residing just out of reach even to the sport's most distinguished competitors.

When the 32-year-old Hawk landed the trick, in an instant it became one of the most talked about sporting moments of the year. It successfully raised the global profile of both Hawk and skateboarding overnight. The world took notice. Activision had found its next sports game.

Sensing the impending boom of extreme sports culture and identifying a niche in the games industry, several marketing executives at Activision came to the conclusion that a skateboarding game would be a sure-fire hit with a young demographic. What it didn't have was a studio to make it a reality.

"We were the natural choice to do it," responds Neversoft co-founder Mick West when asked how the studio got involved with *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater.* "We were just finishing up *Apocalypse* and they wanted to use us for something else. Pretty much straight away they approved us to make an exploratory game prototype and it worked out well."

However, before Neversoft was given the greenlight it was another studio that had originally pitched the idea of a skateboarding game to Activision. The format didn't quite click with the publisher but it liked the concept, so it turned to Neversoft – a studio that had recently helped them out of a bind by turning around the Bruce Willis-starring action game *Apocalypse* in nine months after its original developer dropped out – to make it happen.

"It was attractive to them because we were a team ready to go and we had a lot of skill in getting out a game quickly," says Mick. "They weren't thinking that *Tony Hawk* was going to be the huge seller that it was. They wanted to get a game out on the market by next Christmas and we were the team that could do that." ▶

» Tony Hawk has appeared in eight sequels since the 1999 original.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **DEVELOPER:** NEVERSOFT
» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **GENRE:** EXTREME SPORTS

SKATER PROFILES

A closer look at the roster of characters

TONY HAWK

■ The world's most famous skateboarder retired his board in 1999 but continues to promote skating worldwide.

BOB BURNQUIST

■ Still an active pro skater, in 2010 Burnquist was the fifth person to pull off the infamous 900.

KAREEM CAMPBELL

■ Campbell has become one of the most successful skaters to come out of the US.

RUNE GLIFBERG

■ Hailing from Denmark, he remains an active skater and recently released a line of signature Converse shoes.

BUCKY LASEK

■ Alongside his professional skateboarding career, Lasek is also a professional rallycross driver.

CHAD MUSKA

■ One of the most influential skaters, Muska's recent achievements include opening an alternative clothing store.

ANDREW REYNOLDS

■ As well as his board prowess, Reynolds is a successful entrepreneur.

GEOFF ROWLEY

■ Liverpool-born Geoff Rowley was given *Thrasher* magazine's coveted Skater Of The Year Award in 2000.

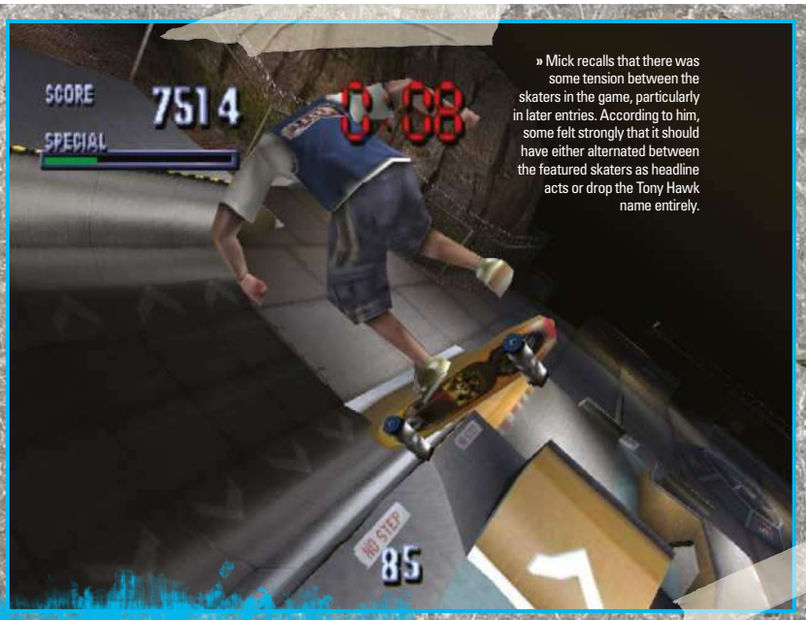
ELISSA STEAMER

■ The first professional female skater, Steamer was last awarded Bronze at the Summer X-Games 2009.

JAMIE THOMAS

■ Nicknamed 'The Chief' Jamie Thomas performed the infamous 'Leap Of Faith' down an 18-foot, 8-inch drop.

» If you look very closely in the Mall level you'll notice a reference to Neversoft's previous game, *Apocalypse*.



» Mick recalls that there was some tension between the skaters in the game, particularly in later entries. According to him, some felt strongly that it should have either alternated between the featured skaters as headline acts or drop the Tony Hawk name entirely.

"The mo-cap session was never actually used – it was more of a publicity thing"

Mick West

The tracklist of Tony Hawk's Pro Skater

DEAD KENNEDYS
Police Truck

THE ERNIES
Here And Now

EVEN RUDE
Villified

GOLDFINGER
Superman

PRIMUS
Jerry Was A Race Car Driver

SPEEDEALER
Screamer/Nothing to Me

SUICIDAL TENDENCIES
Cyco Vision

THE SUICIDE MACHINES
New Girl

UNSANE
Committed

THE VANDALS
Euro-Barge

There was one small problem, though. Neversoft had never made a skateboarding game before – it hadn't even made a sports game before. Where did the relatively unknown studio start when it came to creating one of the most popular gaming franchises of all time?

"The thing about Neversoft was there was a bowling alley opposite the offices," remembers Mick. "We'd go there for lunch sometimes and it had a *Top Skater* machine which was popular with members of the office and that influenced the original thinking."

Created by *Crazy Taxi* creator Kenji Kanno and released by Sega in 1997, *Top Skater* featured a skateboard controller that players stand on to guide skaters down a linear course, performing tricks to get a high score. "We enjoyed playing that game so we tried to make something similar to that," reveals Mick. "You'd go from the start to the end and when you got to the end you'd stop and get a score. It was like a racing game, really – you're basically trying to get around or along a track."

A part of this original thinking remains in the game: two of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*'s courses are downhill with a finish line at the end. However, the idea evolved after the team began studying real-life skaters.

"Things changed drastically when we tried to incorporate elements that we saw in the X-Games," recalls Mick. "People doing tricks in a half-pipe; you can't really get that half-pipe vibe on a downhill course – a half-pipe is going back and forth, over the same spots again and again. So the [original] idea ended up not being as much fun to play as we first thought and the whole game changed over time."

What became obvious was the necessity to enable players to concentrate on and express themselves through the tricks system. Neversoft poured over professional tapes, scrutinising the movements and style of top skaters, and began to integrate boardslides, nosebones and heelflips into the game (which was currently using the existing player model of Bruce Willis from *Apocalypse* as an avatar) understanding that authenticity would be needed to legitimise the concept. But it quickly became apparent that they would need a pro skater to help guide the rest of development.

By the time Tony Hawk signed on to headline the game, Neversoft had already been using the skater as a basis for some of the animations and moves featured in the game, helping to inform the direction of the title. However, with Hawk's star rising, confirmation of his involvement shined a spotlight on the game's development.

"Tony was wildly popular at the time because he got a lot of coverage for doing the 900 for the first time at the X-Games," remembers Mick. "It was an epic thing and he was instantly the most famous skateboarder around. His persona really was a huge part of the publicity for the game. You can see some of the other games suffered from that. Competing skating games were just 'Skating' or something like that and didn't have the same star power, so it certainly helped."

» While most of the environments were complete inventions, Burnside was based on a real skatepark in Portland, Oregon.

» Players could customise their character by choosing different boards, handling and wheel colour. It didn't make much difference to performance but added a touch of personality.

5 EXTREME SPORTS TITLES

We present a selection of other celebrity-endorsed extreme sports games

DAVE MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX 2000

■ Dave Mirra's inaugural videogame effort rides on the coattails of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* somewhat, using it as a template for its own trick-based BMX gameplay. It was nowhere near as impressive as its inspiration but put amazing ragdoll physics to good use to make its crashes all the more brutal.

SUNNY GARCIA SURFING 2001

■ Veteran surfer Sunny Garcia headlines this extreme sports sim that trades realism for wish-fulfilment. Instead of utilising real-world locations, *Sunny Garcia Surfing* invents its own island that boasts the largest waves in the world. Although, it's also teeming with sharks, jet skis and other hazardous objects to avoid.

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2001

■ Hoping to strike gold twice, Activision's *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* is, as you can imagine, an adaptation of the publisher's own *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. Using a modified version of the *Tony Hawk* engine, the carbon-copy gameplay involves passing a series of objectives in each stage to progress to the next level.

KELLY SLATER'S PRO SURFER 2002

■ Another entry in Activision's Pro series of extreme sports titles, *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer* involved stringing tricks together to achieve the highest possible score. Unfortunately, the concept was nowhere near as polished as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, with clunky animations and a noticeable lack of depth.

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING 2008

■ While the original multiformat release garnered a lukewarm reception, it was the Wii version – titled *Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip* – that received the most favourable critical reception. Using the Wii Balance Board to cut through the slopes, White's first game was decent if not particularly remarkable.

Instantly Activision used Tony's involvement to make the wider media aware of the game's production. Journalists from around the world were invited to watch a mo-cap session, where Tony (dressed in a lycra suit covered in white balls) would perform a series of signature moves to be translated into the game. The event was a huge success, but as Mick remembers it wasn't particularly helpful to the continued development of the game. "The mo-cap session was never actually used," he states. "It was more of a publicity thing."

Activision was never under any false impression that the mo-cap data would prove useful to Neversoft. In fact, the studio warned the publisher that it was almost certain the data would be useless. "Activision was going to do it regardless for publicity," continues Mick. "Our animator couldn't really do anything with [the data] because it was not something that we were familiar with using and we had a lot of the animations coming along anyway. We ended up doing everything animate by hand using video reference."

Interestingly, Hawk wouldn't get involved in the design – he offered his thoughts on a few occasions when he visited the studio. When it came to replicating the style and movements of skaters, it was all down to the team figuring it out as they went along. Flip tricks off quarter-pipes, the satisfaction of holding a handstand off the lip, or just perfecting a grind along a handrail – this was new territory for the team and it all had to feel intuitive.

Having taken over player control halfway through development on the first game, Mick implemented the physics and control scheme that would be fundamental to the title's accessible nature. It was a major turning point in development. "In the first game [player control] was quite simple," he says. "You had a table mapping button presses to tricks. It got a lot more complicated in subsequent games. One of the key things about *Tony Hawk* is that it feels very nice to play. It's very responsive. You hold down the X button to crouch and you release to jump. It's very tight, you feel like you're controlling it. It's not like you're pressing it and something happens a tenth of a second later. That's one of the factors that contributed to the success of the game. It was fun to simply skate around and jump off things without really doing anything because it felt so responsive."

Mick ironed out a lot of the bugs – one particular problem involved skaters falling through the level – while adding features such as grinding on rails and wall riding. But it was becoming clear that if it truly wanted to push significant boundaries in the sports genre then the studio would need to look further afield for influence.

"*Super Mario 64* had been out for a while and the concept of open-world games was becoming popular," he continues. This was part of the drift away from the mould of *Top Skater* towards an open-world game. The first level in *Pro Skater*, Warehouse, was fairly basic in terms of level design; a box-like shape with ramps, half-pipes and destructible objects grafted to the scenery. While rudimentary by today's standards, even this fairly limited layout offered a ▶

» Everyone knows the first game featured the unlockable character Officer Dick. But did you know there was another character, Private Carrera, which was only attainable through a cheat code?

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

APOCALYPSE
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

SPIDER-MAN
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2000

GUN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2005

▶ rare sense of freedom for the player. "The original *Tony Hawk* starts with the Warehouse which is a small level, while the second is the School level, which is much more open," considers Mick. "In the first game we weren't using that much reference, so they weren't really based on real places as they were on later games. You sit down and think off the tip of your head 'what environments does a skater skate in?' An empty school is an obvious one, as is a city. We were thinking of areas off the top of our head and trying to think of the real-life things that would be in those levels. In a school, you can go down the railings of steps – that would be a real-life thing. You had to make it a lot more fun as well so you'd stick a lot of quarter-pipes everywhere and let people grind along the tops of walls or phone lines that aren't very real at all. You've got this mixture of reference to real things with other elements that make it more fun."

Pro Skater isn't a realistic game, and Neversoft prioritised fun over simulating skating to a precise degree. After leaping in the air 30 feet, grinding along phone lines and jumping from roof-to-roof, it's fair to assume that the studio wasn't aiming for realistic physics. This approach matched with the open layout of the level design impacted how progression would be defined within the game.

"Collecting the tapes is analogous to collecting the stars in *Mario*," says Mick, once again referencing the seminal Nintendo 64 title. "Each level had five things to do to complete that level and we just brainstormed them. We sat in front of a whiteboard and I drew a level and said 'what can we do?' and we would start throwing out ideas and writing them down."

» The game featured FMVs in the form of showreels of each of the featured characters' most impressive tricks.

> **"It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design"**
> Mick West

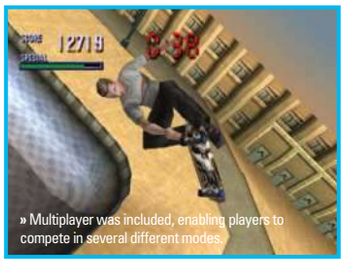
THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE TONY HAWK FRANCHISE

- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2X
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4
- TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND
- TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2
- TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

There were some abandoned concepts, not to mention a few levels (one based along a pier, another on a freeway) that didn't make the cut. The process was collaborative, however Mick reiterates that the team always prioritised fun over gratuitous realism.

"People were always coming up with silly ideas that wouldn't work," he says. "People would say 'what if one of the wheels on your skateboard falls off and you have to skate around on three wheels leaning to one side to go back and get another wheel?' That would be no fun whatsoever. The fun factor is a big consideration in any game idea – people seem to miss that. They think realism is more important than fun. It's not really fun to fall over and break your leg in real life so we didn't simulate that."

Mick reflects on how the studio approached creating a brand new type of game. "The biggest challenge was learning how to do it. We didn't know what we were doing and therefore there was a lot more experimentation." The team had been familiar with the genres it had explored in previous titles. *Apocalypse* was a third-person shooter, which was also similar to a prototype the studio had worked on before getting the job. When it came to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, the studio had to think on its feet and adapt to the challenges it faced as it cut its teeth in the sports genre. "Skating was very new," says Mick. "It had to have a more open world, a trick system where you could score points and an open design. The concepts were alien to people working on the game. It was a new type of game."



» Multiplayer was included, enabling players to compete in several different modes.

That sentiment was shared with consumers upon the game's release. Few games have ever penetrated the cultural zeitgeist quite like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* at the time. Before the *Jackass* generation had ever peeled their first Band-Aid, Neversoft had managed to encapsulate both the incipient prominence of extreme sports and the rebellious, carefree counter-culture of an emerging youth scene. Unsurprisingly, Mick cites the iconic soundtrack as integral to this: "The music was a big thing," he says. "It's not like it's authentic hardcore skating music of the time but it was novel to have a game that had such an interesting soundtrack of music playing in the background all the time. For a lot of skateboarders music is very important to them."

Mick had no idea how important the soundtrack would be to the game's legacy. Its initial implementation was a matter of convenience – the existing engine could support music tracks and video walls (the latter featured heavily across the levels). All that was left was for Activision to pick the tracks.

"It was also capturing skate culture with logos, stickers and using concepts like videoing the moves and collecting tapes, things like that," explains Mick. "They were all taking from skate culture. We tried to do as much things that directly reflected or referenced skating culture as possible."

But what Mick didn't expect was how it would contribute directly to the boom in skating's popularity. Ultimately, with the accessibility of the control scheme matched with a huge amount of depth made it was an essential gaming experience, but Hawk's endorsement gained it a far-reaching appeal. Even though there wasn't anything quite like it on the marketplace, Mick remembers his confidence in the game's success.

"My defining memory was just before the first game was released and I was going out to lunch with the chief executive of Activision at the time," he says. "He was talking about the game and he said something like 'I think this game is going to do fairly well' and I said 'I know it's going to do well. It's going to be a million-selling game.' He said 'we'll see'. And then of course it was. He didn't know what he had at the time and I felt strongly that it was going to be huge," concludes Mick. "I look back at the conversation with particular fondness." *

» The main campaign is divided between objective-based courses and competition stages. The latter involves scoring a certain amount of points to gain medals.

» Rather than hire external developers with experience working in the sports genre, Neversoft felt there was no game comparable and therefore it was the same team as *Apocalypse* that worked on the game.

» If you successfully pulled off a string of tricks your special bar would fill. Each character had a selection of individual special moves.

» Each level has a set of objectives to complete. Some were as simple as scoring a set amount of points, others were more arbitrary.

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER HD
TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM
TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND
TONY HAWK'S MOTION
TONY HAWK: RIDE
TONY HAWK: SHRED
TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 5

MOST SECRET

THE MAKING OF MEDAL OF HONOR

It is one of the PlayStation's longest running franchises and was overseen by none other than Steven Spielberg himself. Ed Smith talks to the men who proved that it was possible to treat war with the utmost respect

» There's a variety of weapons, so make sure you always have the best one for each situation.

» Being hit with a bazooka shell would spell an instant death.

» Objectives, like sneaking about a U-boat in disguise, were integral to *MOH*'s level design.

» Hit reactions were also finely tuned, giving them game a more deliberate pace.

By the time work started on *Medal Of Honor*, the Second World War had been over for 52 years. The top-grossing films were *Titanic*, *Men In Black* and *Jurassic Park: The Lost World*, and the videogame charts were dominated by *Quake* and *GoldenEye 007*. This was before *Saving Private Ryan*, before *The Thin Red Line*. Though war drama was about to have a big resurgence, in 1997, it wasn't in vogue.

Similarly, the PlayStation was still finding its feet. Sony's first console had sold well, shipping around 25 million units worldwide, but the catalogue of games was dominated by just a few genres. *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy VII* were the biggest hits that year, along with *Tekken*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *PaRappa The Rapper*. A studio called Insomniac had just shipped its *Doom* clone, *Disruptor*, over to Japan, but apart from that, on PlayStation the first-person shooter was yet to break through.

So Dreamworks Interactive, founded by Steven Spielberg and comprised of only 30 people, had a challenge on its hands. Not only did it want to reintroduce war history to the mainstream, but also build a sophisticated first-person shooter on an as yet untested platform. Peter Hirschmann, *Medal Of Honor*'s writer and producer, remembers the early stages of development:

"*Medal Of Honor* kicked off officially on 11 November 1997, when Steven returned from Europe after wrapping principal photography on *Saving Private Ryan*. He wanted to teach a new generation about World War Two, but knew his movie would be too intense for younger audiences. His insight was to reach young people through a medium they'd embraced: videogames

"Looking back it's ridiculous, but the idea was controversial at the time because he was proposing an FPS that didn't have high-tech weapons or take place on another planet. And this was before WW2 had come back into the public consciousness, before *Ryan* and before Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*. Plus, we only had 2Mb of memory, so forgetting even the broader context of WW2, we first had to figure out how to deliver a fun shooter experience. Not to compare ourselves to *Jaws*, but Steven said that not having a shark that worked all the time forced him to get creative. The same went for our team."

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION

» **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

Nobody was more aware of that than Christopher Cross, *MOH*'s lead designer. To accommodate the scale of *Medal Of Honor* on PlayStation, he and fellow designer Lynne Henson had to pull a lot of tricks, as he tells us. "The idea to do a first-person shooter on the PlayStation was f**king crazy. These days you think of someone using, say, the Unreal Engine and building a whole level by themselves. We couldn't do that. We had to be very careful with the amount of polygons we used because of the hardware.

"An enemy in *MOH* is maybe 200 polys – today, they don't even make hats that are less than 200 polys. So, we could only have four enemies on the screen at once. We had to work with smoke and mirrors so players wouldn't notice the enemies were backfilling. Also, we had to cut skyboxes. That's why every level takes place at night. In the end, though, that kind of worked out, since you're playing an OSS officer doing secret missions. It added a lot of atmosphere."

★

That wasn't the only instance where technical boundaries actually aided *MOH*'s development. As design work went on, Christopher, contrary to his initial reaction, discovered the PSone was well suited to a war FPS.

"The analogue controller was announced before we launched but we didn't design around it because we couldn't guarantee it had market penetration, so we were using the D-pad. That gave the games a really deliberate pace, since we were tuning them to the directional buttons. We had to allow time to set up the situation, to show that, say, there are three guys coming, there's cover over here, a gun on that wall. We let players figure out the situation and decide how to approach it.

"Plus, killing enemies was never meant to be an objective, never meant to be something you had to do to finish a level. Modern games have these cardboard cutouts popping up all the time – it's just a test of your switch skills. With *MOH*, you'd need to shoot one guy in the foot, one guy in the hand then one guy in the head, then come back to the other two. It was a much slower paced game. It was a lot more intimate." ▶

» The OSS was used as a backdrop, since it gave *MOH*'s writers context to the send player all across Europe.

THE REAL MEDAL OF HONOR

Though he now works for Nexon – the free-to-play publisher launching Cliff Bleszinki's next game, BlueStreak – Christopher Cross has a neat idea for a new Medal Of Honor:

"It'd be based on real *Medal Of Honor* recipients, because some of their stories are amazing. There's one guy, John Robert Fox [pictured, left], who was a forward observer during a siege by German troops on a town in Italy. He was calling in artillery and basically, for him to actually stop the advance of the German column, he had to call in an artillery strike on his own position. They warned him that he could die but he did it anyway, and then later they found his body. That would have been an amazing mission, putting you in the position where you realise, off the top of your own head, that you have to do this and you'll probably die."

» Peter Hirschmann wanted to keep the game's briefing sections short but highly informative.

» Sometimes a simple gun isn't enough to get the job done.

Just as Christopher found a way to make the PlayStation hardware work for *MOH*, Peter Hirschman turned the daunting task of creating an educational war game to his favour. With Spielberg's brief in mind, he had the responsibility to make *Medal Of Honor* historically accurate without compromising its entertainment value. The more he wrote and researched, the more he found that one aspect complemented the other.

"It was key to provide as much historical context as possible," he says. "Absolutely, there was a concerted effort to give *Medal Of Honor* an educational quality, but it almost felt subversive. I didn't want to scare anyone into thinking it was anything but a game. First and foremost, *Medal Of Honor* was meant to be entertainment.

"From a story perspective, it was all about backing into it. We needed someone whose initial combat experience matched the player (ie they had none), but yet had a legitimate reason to be in the European Theater of Operations in 1944. So Jimmy Patterson was a C-47 pilot, shot down behind enemy lines. We needed a context to move him all around the continent. So bam, he's recruited into the OSS. That allowed us to cover a lot of ground. To this day, I imagine we're the only game that had mission objectives varying from sabotaging V2 rockets to saving a rare edition of the Canterbury Tales."

Just as the absent skyboxes and minimal enemies gave *Medal Of Honor* its atmosphere, the authentic World War backdrop distinguished it from other shooters of the Nineties. The game had a distinctive flavour. It lived on the principal that truth was better than fiction. "I think people actually love to learn history," says Peter. "And working with constraints will often push you to a better place. Instead of fighting the limitations, you embrace them and get to work."

But it wasn't all plain sailing. Despite the pioneering *GoldenEye*, objective-based first-person shooters were still uncommon in the Nineties. *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Doom* and *Quake* challenged players to simply get from one end of a level to another – there was no need to program in things like bombs, collectibles or stealth mechanics.

That put Christopher on the horns of a dilemma. If *Medal Of Honor* was to have this broad, authentic-feeling narrative, he and the other designers needed to find ways to make all these objectives – from sneaking aboard a U-boat to sabotaging it with dynamite – flow together. It meant a lot of scripting work and, again, getting creative with the PlayStation's hardware.

"Lynne did most of the paper designs for levels. I reviewed those, handed them off to the artists then took them back and started to add in the gameplay elements. We'd walk through the maps saying 'we're going to do this objective here, have the rail-gun here' and so on. It was very organic. But then we had to develop a scripting language that could send messages between objects in the game, something to tell an objective when it was complete or when bombs had been picked up – things like that. Things got complicated. The Wolfram level for example had lots of objectives. That meant the level couldn't exist 100 per cent in memory – it was too much. So we had to stream it all off the disc, which meant breaking the world up into compartments, so that when you walked between areas, parts of the level would load and unload in front and behind you.

"But, of course, all of the scripts still had to be associated with an object, so in that one level on the boat, the key was at the front, the door was at the back and because of the loading and unloading, when you picked up the key it didn't unlock the door because the door didn't exist – it hadn't loaded. The game didn't have an inventory, so we had to come up with a lot of creative ways to get around that."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE NEVERHOOD
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1996

SKULLMONKEYS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997

BOOM BLOX (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: WII
YEAR: 2008

> **"INSTEAD OF FIGHTING THE LIMITATIONS, YOU EMBRACE THEM AND GET TO WORK"**
> Christopher Cross

» Dale Dye, Spielberg's technical advisor on *Saving Private Ryan*, would later join the *Medal Of Honor* franchise.

After almost two years in development, *Medal Of Honor* launched in October 1999. With the fundamentals now in place, Dreamworks was free to follow it up with a sequel, *Medal Of Honor: Underground*, less than 12 months later.

Alongside *Saving Private Ryan* and latterly *Band Of Brothers*, *MOH* spearheaded the resurgence of WW2 history in popular culture. Christopher would go on to head up design on *Medal Of Honor: Frontline*, while Peter became EA's project lead on the PC-only *Allied Assault*. Two guys working for him, Jason West and Vince Zampella, would eventually break off and form their own World War Two franchise – *Call Of Duty*.

Now, 15 years and three generations since Dreamworks embarked on its great crusade, Christopher worries that the war game has gone backwards: "In *Medal Of Honor*, you were going into Germany, and you'd find the Germans sitting around a fire or taking a pee, because this was their home – this is where they were stationed. You could see a backpack propped up or something on a bench. We didn't just popcorn-spawn 50 guys.

"The intention was to make you feel like 'I f**ked up that guy's day' or 'those guys were just eating soup, damn'. It had to feel like it was them or you, not that there were ten more things between you and the next movie moment.

"We wanted people to have some connection to the Germans, which in turn would give every situation a sense of gravity. But in modern games, in the interest of speedy asset creation, they put gas masks on enemies and stuff like that. They dehumanise them. To actually do a reboot of *MOH* in the old mould, you'd need storytelling chops. But I think the monetary and market forces on these games now makes something with a bit of gravity destined to fail. This is why World War Two shooters still make sense. You know the Allies win and that the world is a better place for it, and that makes a big change about your attitude towards your own actions. It means more than just watching the Eiffel Tower blow up or whatever."

» You'll need quick reactions to take down certain enemy soldiers.

SPIELBERG ON THE SMALL SCREEN

There are plenty of games based on the movie mogul's films

ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

FORMAT: Atari 2600 **YEAR:** 1982

■ Commonly described as one of the worst games ever made, hundreds of thousands of unsold copies of *ET* were eventually consigned to the Atari landfill site in New Mexico, which was excavated in 2013.

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

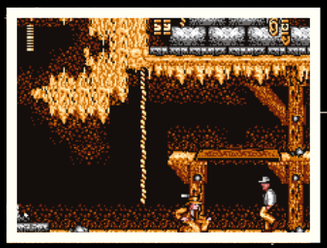
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 1985

■ A rock-hard platformer, *Temple Of Doom* is notable for its licensed John Williams score and voice clips from Harrison Ford. They're digitised, though, so they sound a bit rubbish.

JAWS

FORMAT: NES **YEAR:** 1987

■ This 8-bit adaptation of the original summer blockbuster combines action and RPG-elements, as you kill smaller sharks to upgrade your skills before taking on the daddy: Jaws himself.



INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE ACTION GAME

FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 1989

■ One of the earlier LucasArts efforts, this platformer for the Spectrum and various others featured a punishing final level where players had to race to find the Holy Grail.

HOOK

FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 1992

■ There were several games based on Spielberg's pirate adventure, the most famous being a side-scroller for SNES, Genesis and Game Gear. The publisher, Sony Imagesoft, would later merge with Sony Interactive.

THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK

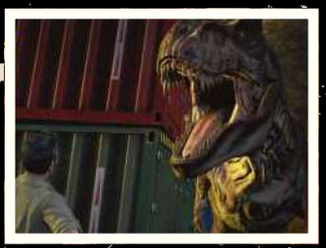
FORMAT: PlayStation, Saturn **YEAR:** 1997

■ This was the second Dreamworks game based on *Jurassic Park*. Also worth looking up is *Jurassic Park: Trespasser*, which features the most bizarre aiming controls ever.

MINORITY REPORT: EVERYBODY RUNS

FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 2002

■ It's strange this got panned the way it did. Developed by Treyarch, of *Call Of Duty* fame, and published by Activision, it also had an original score by *Hitman* stalwart Jesper Kyd.



JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME

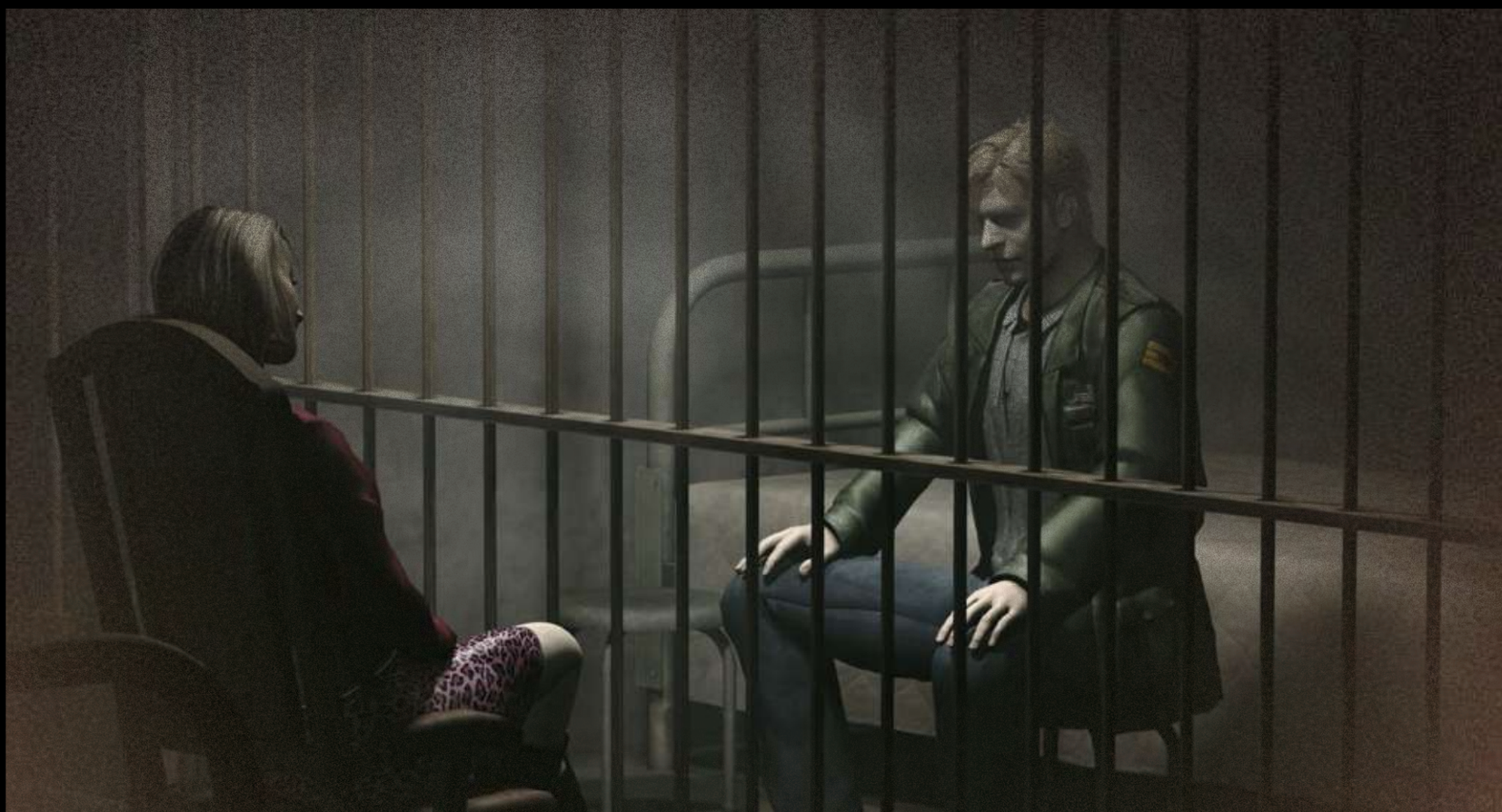
FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 2011

■ After securing a licence deal with Universal, Telltale, maker of *The Walking Dead*, produced this four-part episodic adventure game focusing on events before, during and after the 1993 blockbuster.

THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN: THE SECRET OF THE UNICORN

FORMAT: Various **YEAR:** 2011

■ Ubisoft Montpellier launched this to tie in with Spielberg's underrated adaptation of the famous Belgian comic. A sequel to that movie is reportedly in the works.



SILENT HILL 2

Konami's classic is a perfect game, and it's still inspiring survival horror today

Words by Andy Hartup

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT TOKYO
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **PLATFORM:** PS2

Few games have the good fortune of being perfect but, for me, *Silent Hill 2* is. Now over 15 years old, everything in this dream-like tale of obsession, guilt, and desperate redemption feels deliberately placed; every aspect is perfectly intended. I'm not trying to claim that – mechanically – *Silent Hill 2* is the pinnacle of video game development. Far from it. However, as the game's themes so comfortably align with the technology on which it was created, and because the content has been so carefully curated, this is one of the rare examples of a title that few people would change in any way. And it's still inspiring horror games like the recent *Resident Evil 2 Remake* to this day. Why is it perfect? Well, it's a bit of a cheat, actually.

Silent Hill 2 actually shares a close connection with *Assassin's Creed*, which is far from a horror experience (unless you saw that inside-out faces bug in *Unity*). Both these games have created convenient excuses for their shortcomings, making them masterful examples of gaming design. *Assassin's Creed* has the Animus – a virtual reality system that the game's hero uses for the bulk of the action. It's a convenient way to explain things like on-screen health bars, endless retries, and invisible walls – classic gaming tropes we take for granted that simply wouldn't be acceptable in the real world. By telling players that their hero is playing 'a game within a game' Ubisoft carefully sidesteps the less realistic elements of their story (and any unintentional bugs) to craft a narrative that contains an extra layer of authenticity; that feels closer to the player's real world. We've even seen Ubisoft take it a step further, by positioning Animus maker Abstergo as a real company.

In a bizarre way, *Silent Hill 2* does the same thing. The game has a dream-like quality. Nothing about it seems real to begin with. It all starts with protagonist James Sunderland pondering his reflection in a filthy bathroom mirror (a smart nod to the overarching theme of self-discovery, and maybe a cheeky reference to the eyes being the window to the soul), immediately forcing the player to acknowledge who they're taking control of. They instantly become part of James' nightmare, and from then on anything that happens does so within the context of this state of unreality. As you descend the overly-long pathway into town, you're slipping deeper in James' nightmare. Once you accept this, any number of technical shortcomings can be written off as part of the bizarre dream that the game exists within.

Bit flimsy? Well, it goes a little deeper, thanks to a handful of happy coincidences (no, I don't know the collective noun for a 'happy coincidence') and smart slices of design. First off – the fog. *Silent Hill 2* was created on a console (PS2) with a relatively limited draw distance, so instead of rendering the whole town as far as the eye can see, technical limits forced the developers to blanket it with a murky shroud of mist. I say 'forced' – chances are the team was happy to do it, because there's something deeply unsettling about hearing creatures shuffling around in the haze. The bulk of the horror then takes place in the player's imagination, as they wonder what abomination will come shuffling out.

Guess what? The fog is now an integral part of the game. When it was thinned for the HD remakes on PS3 it actually lessened the experience. Same applies to the now out-dated controls. To fight, you need to pull a trigger, aim, and press a button on the pad. The effect is always underwhelming, as if the game

» [PS2] Maria, a doppelganger of James' wife, is not quite who she seems to be

» [PS2] Claustrophobic fog adds to the game's foreboding atmosphere

is deliberately making you feel helpless. Which you are. James is just a normal (well...) guy, not a soldier or a ninja. He's truly pathetic in a fight. And when you try to run, the original 'tank' controls and fixed camera angles make it awkward and annoying. As the player, you're meant to feel weak; at the mercy of the monsters which may – or may not – be all in your mind.

To an extent, *Resident Evil 7* plays with similar feelings of helplessness. You're locked in to first-person, forcing you to live within the horror and never detach from it. Play in VR, and that gets taken to a whole new level. It's another example of creators thinking about the benefits and limits of current technology, and bending it to make the player feel vulnerable in the face of otherworldly terror. Playable teaser? Kojima deliberately used the downloadable demo format (so, a small area ripe for repeated exploration) to ratchet tension and slowly unfold a story over the course of several hours. It's a smart use of existing technology and expectations.

Now, you're probably thinking that I'm making excuses for *Silent Hill 2*. Perhaps, but the quantity of deliberate nods from the developer blurs the line between intentional and accidental. Maybe the controls are just crappy. Maybe all the doors are locked because they couldn't be bothered to render more rooms, and not (as I'd suggest) to reinforce that panicked feeling of disorientation and inability to escape. Maybe. So why, then, does the game delight in messing with you in other ways? Like the way it changes the ending dependent on seemingly innocuous details within the game? For example, if you spend most of your time with health below 50%, you'll get the 'Water' ending, where James commits suicide by driving his car into Toluca Lake. It's the creators assuming that you don't care for your own life if you can't be bothered to heal. And what about the dead guy in the Wood Side apartments, who looks an awful lot like James? There are too many examples of smart game design to dismiss the shortcomings as deliberately clumsy.

And then there's Maria. She's the pivot on which the game (un)balances; the physical manifestation of James' desires; the woman he always wished Mary (his dead wife) was. Her constant disappearing and reappearing act keeps the player disoriented, while the threat of the unkillable Pyramid Head (yeah, he's the physical manifestation of James' guilt) keeps them on edge. You never feel comfortable playing this game. It's a potent combination, but one that remains undulled by time. Because now – as back in 2001 – you're just as helpless and bewildered. In fact, because modern games have increasingly veered towards hand-holding and pandering to power fantasies, it's even more refreshing to find one that deliberately wants to punish its players. We've grown accustomed to being treated like the hero, not the villain, and this only magnifies *Silent Hill 2*'s vile devices and themes.

» [PS2] *Silent Hill 2* is a masterclass in psychological horror

Again, *Resident Evil 7* – by rebooting the increasingly gung-ho franchise – takes us away from the power fantasy we see in other games. While we're by no means helpless in *Resi 7*, there's never a sense that you're over-powered and comfortable, and this is at the root of great horror. Same with *Outlast*. These games follow *Silent Hill 2*'s example of making players feel uncomfortable with themselves (and o ften helpless) while they progress. It's a smart trick.

Resi 7, too, plays with notions about 'who the bad guy really is', using it to throw you off balance. In a mirror image of *Silent Hill 2*'s 'you start out thinking you're the good guy, but you're actually the villain', *Resi 7* immediately presents you with the stereotypical baddos you expect, before turning that notion on its head half way through. No spoilers here, but you know who I'm talking about.

A perfect game, then. Not one that creates an unimpeachable utopia that's 100% guaranteed to delight anyone who plays it (can that ever truly exist?), but a grim, unrelentingly uncomfortable descent through one man's nightmare, where everything bad or frustrating happens as part of the overall experience. Embracing imperfection, steering into the skid, is perhaps the only way a game can be perfect, and that's *Silent Hill 2*'s true, dark brilliance – even in 2020, over 20 years after its release. ★

» [PS2] The game has multiple endings depending on your playthrough. Including one very, *very* strange secret ending involving a dog…

» [PS2] *Silent Hill*'s gritty, dark and highly unnerving style set the standard for subsequent horror games

» [PS2] James' lack of combat skills compounds the player's feelings of helplessness

grand theft auto III
THE MAKING OF...

» Carjacking was a fundamental part of *GTA III*, and suddenly it felt a whole lot more real compared to the 2D of its predecessors.

» Baseball bats, guns and other assorted weapons became the hallmark of the *GTA* series, along with carjacking and humour.

Grand Theft Auto V has become an epic instalment in the GTA series after hitting £1 billion in sales in just three days. But, as David Crookes writes, could it ever have the same impact as GTA III?

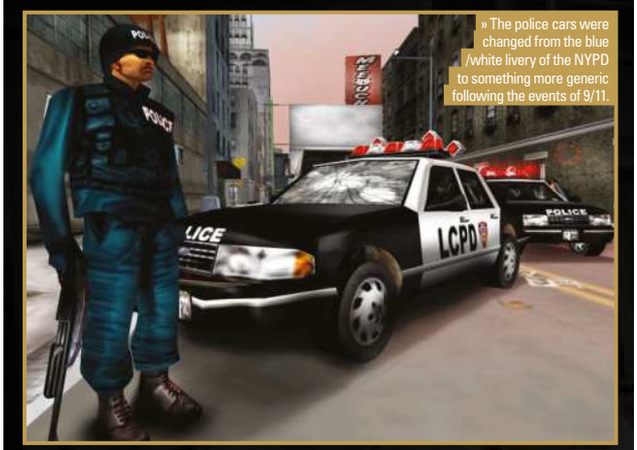
4 March 2000. Hundreds of thousands of people were waking up, excited. After one of the most successful pre-order periods in videogaming history, they were ready to head for the shops to pick up their shiny new PlayStation 2. The PSone had already been massively successful in breaking the hold that Sega and Nintendo had on the market in the early Nineties, and now it was Sony's chance to vie for dominance with the next generation.

With the dawn of PlayStation 2 came possibilities, but for months they were not realised. The initial line-up of games was lacklustre and people were tending to use their consoles as a glorified DVD player far more than they were for playing games. But in 2001, the technological abilities of one of the finest, most influential consoles of all time – one that is still the biggest selling ever – were being unleashed. And one of the key games that year, a title that made people sit up and take notice not just of the PS2 but also of games in general, was *Grand Theft Auto III*.

'At last', the developers at DMA Design breathed, 'we can free ourselves from the shackles of restraint and make the game we always want to make'. Alan Campbell, who had worked on the first two *GTA* games, was among those developers. "I think the intention was to make *Grand Theft Auto III* the game that the original *GTA* had always wanted to be," he declares.

He begins to talk gushingly about the controversial debut game, discussing the high ambition the team had for the project right from the start. He calls the concept of *GTA* "novel, liberating and fun" and notes its "irreverent humour". Such is his love of the first game of what would become a long-running series; you do wonder just what *GTA* was actually lacking.

But Alan wanted one more thing: he, like so many others, wanted to see the game in 3D. PlayStation 2 made this possible. "Taking everything that was great about the first two games into 3D was an obvious step," says Alan. "Suddenly the game became so much more immersive."



» The police cars were changed from the blue /white livery of the NYPD to something more generic following the events of 9/11.

> **People were staying late at the office to play the game. That doesn't always happen**
> Alan Campbell

With two *GTA* games under their belts, the artists and coders at DMA had a lot of experience with their growing franchise. In 1999, the team had been given a financial vote of confidence when Take-Two Interactive bought the company, bringing with it Rockstar Games which was part of the same family.

The "alignment" of Rockstar with DMA was mentioned in Take-Two's takeover statement as being a "perfect match" and it meant Dan Houser, who had founded Rockstar, could exert some control over the new *GTA* game. He wanted *GTA III* to have a cinematic quality, taking everything that was great about the 2D *GTA* games and giving them an additional sense of life, so Criterion Games's RenderWare engine was fired up and the team got cracking.

There was a clear understanding of what the game was going to be. Dan said the brief was to produce a post-industrial, contemporary Midwest/East Coast generic city in which anything would go. Over time, this city started to resemble New York, but that was not seen to be a problem. In fact, it was quite the opposite, with Dan feeling the greater parallel realism meant that the developers could up the commentary on life in general.

While some gamers bemoaned the move to 3D, Dan believed the dimension transcended the gameplay too. It had to suddenly feel more real. It had to sound more real. Such an ambition was reflected in the initial scripts. "One of the appeals of *GTA* was playing in the real world," says Brian Baglow, who wrote scripts for *GTA III* in the first three months of development. "*GTA III* was due for release in autumn of 2001, and so the goal was to be contemporary and make the setting the same timescale. I was one of a few writers on *GTA III* because the team was growing enormously. There were all of these test runs with ▶

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ROCKSTAR GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** DMA DESIGN
- **RELEASED:** 2001
- **PLATFORM:** PC, PS2
- **GENRE:** ACTION/ ADVENTURE

» Alan Campbell is now a successfull author. Discover his work at www.alanmcampbell.co.uk.

» The PC version of the game was released a year later, in 2002.

▶ RenderWare going on and prototypes and so forth. It was a mammoth task."

Brian says the overall tone, subversive streak and dark humour was there from the start, however. "That's what I was working on, script-wise, for around three months, around the time that the company moved from Dundee to Edinburgh," he adds.

So when the player took control of criminal Claude and saw him escape from the Liberty City Bank, hearing gunshots fired and watching accomplice Catalina turning on him in a move that would see him banged up for 10 years, it immediately set the tone.

It felt film-like and charted a descent into the underworld, with Claude working for the city's Yakuza gang and its leader Asuka Kasen. Its gritty yet exotic tone and a sense that anything goes pervaded a game hot on character in both its make-up and the people who populated this virtual world.

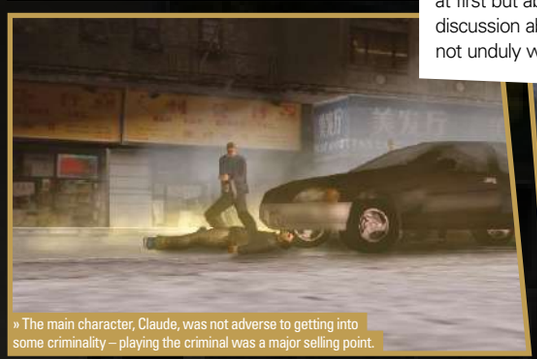
Indeed, the team actually drew influence from the world of film. "*Reservoir Dogs* had come out just after the first game and so we looked and worked with concepts from that film and others like *Payback* with Mel Gibson," says Brian. "We were looking at a variety of styles – did we want cool and stylised like Pulp Fiction as the overall tone? I actually wrote to Quentin Tarantino to ask him to check the game out. I didn't hear back."

> **"Taking everything that was great about the first two games into 3D was an obvious step"**
> Alan Campbell

A lot of fresh talent had been employed for the first game, and so the original group drove forward more on ambition and a steep learning curve than anything else, with the team – glued together by lead programmer Keith Hamilton – determined to push forward with a living, breathing city. But the move for 3D needed experience: creating this kind of metropolis in 3D required bravery on a new level so, more than ever, it could not motor along on graduate talent alone.

The experienced staff was able to pick up speed right from the start and development was rather smooth. There were some experiments – a cartoon-look was considered at first but abandoned – and there was a discussion about violence, but Houser was not unduly worried about such levels, equating them to nothing that would not be seen in a TV show or a movie. He would later say there was far less violence in the game than in a first-person shooter.

"It wasn't long before the player models and first car models were whizzing around a collection of rudimentary city blocks," says Alan, who recalled the game progressing steadily as artists added more models and textures. "We developed the AI so that the cops and other characters would respond to your presence, and the level designers wrote increasingly complex scripts for missions."



» The main character, Claude, was not adverse to getting into some criminality – playing the criminal was a major selling point.

» DMA Design opted for a gritty and yet stylish approach to the underworld life of a city.

Like its predecessors, *GTA III* was always about giving the player an environment in which they could do more or less whatever they wanted, so freedom was always an essential feature. It meant you could choose to mow down pedestrians or drive a car off a bridge. Alan says the team did not want the player being prevented from doing this and, as such, he says, "Liberty City was an apt name for such a place."

Development continued rather unhindered and that, again, was due to having a lot of the game nailed early on. "Most of the concepts that didn't make it into the *GTA* series were actually rejected during development of the earlier versions," says Alan. "In the brief for the original *GTA* the player could choose to be a cop. We scrapped that because it was so much more fun to play a criminal. We even thought about introducing zombies at one point, but there wasn't time at that stage. If you go back even further, *GTA* was originally intended to be a dinosaur game. We had this great engine, which was based on a shearing algorithm, but it was limited. Not much good at drawing volcanoes and jungles, but perfect for cityscapes. That's why the executable for the first game was called dino.exe."

It meant that by the time *GTA III* started development, everyone was on the same wavelength and knew what the game had to be. The development office at DMA Design was abuzz with everyone fired up about what the team was doing and there was a wealth of investment.

MULTIPLAYER GTA III?

Why you couldn't play Grand Theft Auto III online

The menus of the PC version of *GTA III* included listings for Multiplayer. There were, Rockstar told fans, plans to have multiplayer in the game but those plans were dropped. Resources were instead directed towards making *Vice City* because there was a feeling that the team could not make multiplayer good enough given the technology and time they had.

Of far greater concern at the time was the inevitable questions of the impact *Grand Theft Auto*'s move to 3D would have on the players. "Here you could actually see what was happening, not through the characters' eyes but in third-person," says Brian. "And so there were policemen being killed and you could see them as you ran them over."

He says violence in 3D was, therefore, definitely a consideration. "There were debates over first and third-person perspectives and what would happen when the game got its release. But as with the first two games and the rest it's always come down to gameplay and what's most enjoyable, and that's always been the key to *GTA*'s success. It's not violence or reflections of society but it's always been about creating a damn good game."

» The PC version of *GTA III* was the better looking game, but many will have better memories of the PS2 game.

"The team was a lot larger than the original, with a core of perhaps 20-odd people – artists, coders, designers, producers and sound engineers who would be there every day making the game – but with dozens more involved in one way or another," recalls Alan. "And I don't actually recall any disagreements about the game's direction. The concept was fairly solid and the design had been ironed out fairly early."

He says the most difficult task he had to contend with was figuring out how to get NPC pedestrians smoothly into vehicles because all the cars were different. "They had door handles in different places and seats at different heights, and so on," he recalls. "It involved chaining together dozens of different animations and altering key frames in code, so it was very fiddly."

There was, however, time to input some little quirks too. One of the artists who was constructing buildings positioned several towers to spell out a certain – extremely rude – word which could only be seen from above. "I've no idea if it stayed in the finished game," says Alan, who was not adverse to some skullduggery of his own.

"I was coding the pedestrians at the time and the producer asked me to increase the player's health whenever they picked up a hooker," he continues. "That was only a five minute job, so after I'd done that I thought I'd add something a little more elaborate. I asked the sound guys to give me a 'car suspension creak' sound and then I wrote a piece of code that would bounce the player's car, faster and faster, whenever it stopped in an isolated spot. The rest of the team thought it was pretty funny, so it stayed in the game. I still remember my source code because it was appallingly lewd, with variables such as 'hump_rate'."

Over the two years it took to make the game, the team primarily got on with the job in hand. Since the story and mission design had been well thought-out and the overall script writing was deemed to be excellent, the team were enjoying testing the game as they went along. They were achieving great things and, while their game may not have been the first game to have a single, unbroken 3D world (an accolade that actually goes to *Jak & Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* since *GTA III* had loading times between Liberty City's islands), success was being virtually guaranteed.

"The missions were entertaining, fun," Alan says. "I recall that at one point, people were staying late at the office to play the game. That doesn't always happen during development, because you live with the project day in and day out and playing it can often seem like work. Not with *GTA III*."

He says the team found it quite quick to integrate certain aspects of the game. "In any big project you sometimes find that you need things that nobody had planned for – animations to get a character to do some specific thing, extra sounds, special textures or weapon effects, AI tweaks and so on," says Alan.

The excellent sound and music design happened in another part of the building, and so the process of its creation was essentially hidden from most of the rest of the team. Audio director Allan Walker recorded live squelchy sounds when pedestrians were run over. Lead music producer Craig Connor recalls crushing fruit and raw chicken to achieve the effect.

» Not adverse to a bit of self-reference, there is even a Rockstar office in the game and this was shown in an official screenshot from the makers.

OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES

- **GRAND THEFT AUTO - 1997**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: LONDON (1969) - 1999**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: LONDON (1961) - 1999**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO 2 - 1999**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO III - 2001**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY - 2002**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS - 2004**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO ADVANCE - 2004**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES - 2005**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES - 2006**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV - 2008**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: THE LOST AND DAMNED - 2009**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS - 2009**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO: THE BALLAD OF GAY TONY - 2009**
- **GRAND THEFT AUTO V - 2013**

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LEMMINGS
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, CDTV, DOS, ST, SPECTRUM, CD-I, ATARI LYNX, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1991

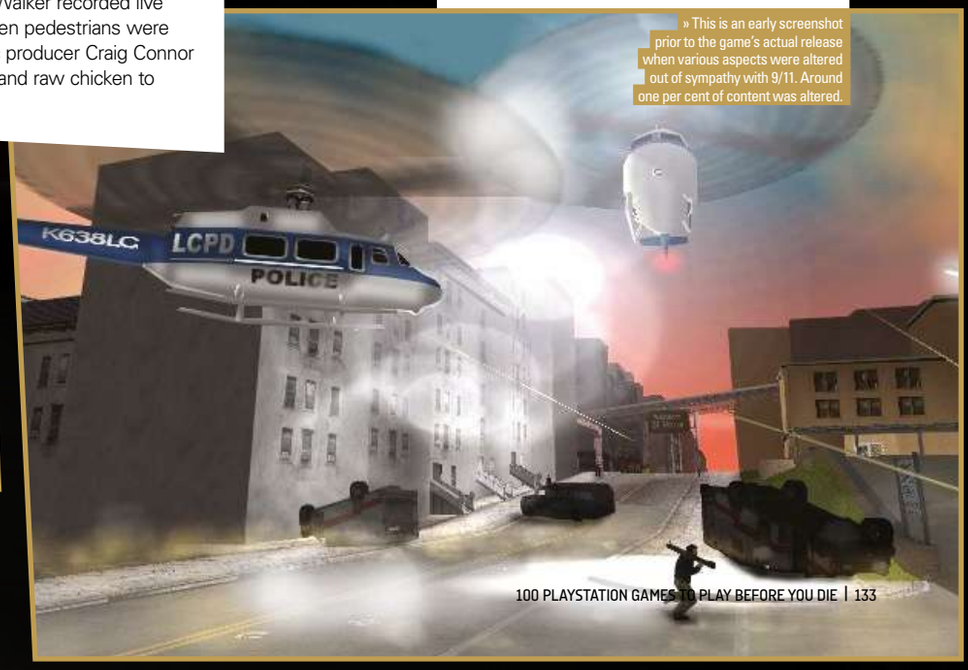
GRAND THEFT AUTO
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, WINDOWS, GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 1997

BODY HARVEST
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1998

"It seemed to me that the first radio stations just appeared in the game, fully formed, pretty much overnight," says Alan. "Suddenly we had all this exceptional music, which immediately lifted the game to another level. I think that was the point where the game first felt like a proper game you might buy in the shops."

Having experienced voice actors also upped the quality. Frank Vincent, Michael Madsen and Michael Rapaport rubbed shoulders with Joe Pantoliano, Debi Mazar and Kyle MacLachlan. Hearing doors close, guns being shot, pedestrians talk and the burning of rubber as cars screeched away to the sounds of the radio stations felt like a New York of the Eighties with its hustle, bustle and sense of danger.

Of course, such a large open-world game like *GTA III* brought its own issues. Play testing was difficult with so many events that *could* happen making it hard to predict what *would* happen. The lack of linearity meant the play testers could not even try to second-guess the order someone may play. "You ▶



» This is an early screenshot prior to the game's actual release when various aspects were altered out of sympathy with 9/11. Around one per cent of content was altered.

OPEN WORLDS

America has become a great source of exploration for videogames, as the following releases prove...

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

LOCATION: New York

■ The franchise's first full sequel after *GTA III* saw the team returning to the mean streets of Liberty City. While it's a strong offering for the franchise, it sometimes felt like a step backwards after the sheer size and scope of *GTA: San Andreas*. This was soon corrected with the expansions *The Lost And Damned* and *The Ballad Of Gay Tony*.

DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

LOCATION: San Fransisco

■ Ubisoft Reflections's 2011 classic had the high-speed chases and activity of a typical day in the likes of Liberty City but brought with it a silly plot. Such a thing mattered little though, as the city created by the developer was sprawling and fun to explore.

SAINTS ROW

LOCATION: Detroit (inspired)

■ Labelled a clone of *GTA III* from the moment it was unveiled on the Xbox 360, *Saints Row* certainly took the humour of *GTA* and ramped it up with lots of one-liners and quotes from movies. A nice-looking, free-flowing game set in a city inspired by Detroit and Chicago that pricked the interest of critics.

SAN FRANCISCO

LAS VEGAS

LOS ANGELES

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

LOCATION: Las Vegas

■ With mercs and mutated animals all around you and a post-apocalyptic world to explore, players assumed the role of the Courier trekking across the Mojave Desert. *New Vegas* was incredibly similar to *Fallout 3* but it brought new areas and some amazing rolling deserts that gave a sense of isolation and awe.

GTA: VICE CITY

LOCATION: Miami

■ Quite simply our favourite *Grand Theft Auto* game, mainly because it does an incredible job of nailing the Eighties with smart level design and a truly killer soundtrack. While the story is effectively a greatest hits of every Hollywood story you've ever watched, it's tied together with a deft touch that is often missing from other *GTA* games. A true classic.

GTA: SAN ANDREAS

LOCATION: Los Angeles

■ This is arguably the most ambitious *GTA* game that Rockstar has ever created, with minor RPG mechanics and a host of new gameplay additions, including the ability to ride pedal bikes and parachute off buildings. *Grand Theft Auto V* returned to the same area, mainly focusing on Los Santos.

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

LOCATION: Southern Border

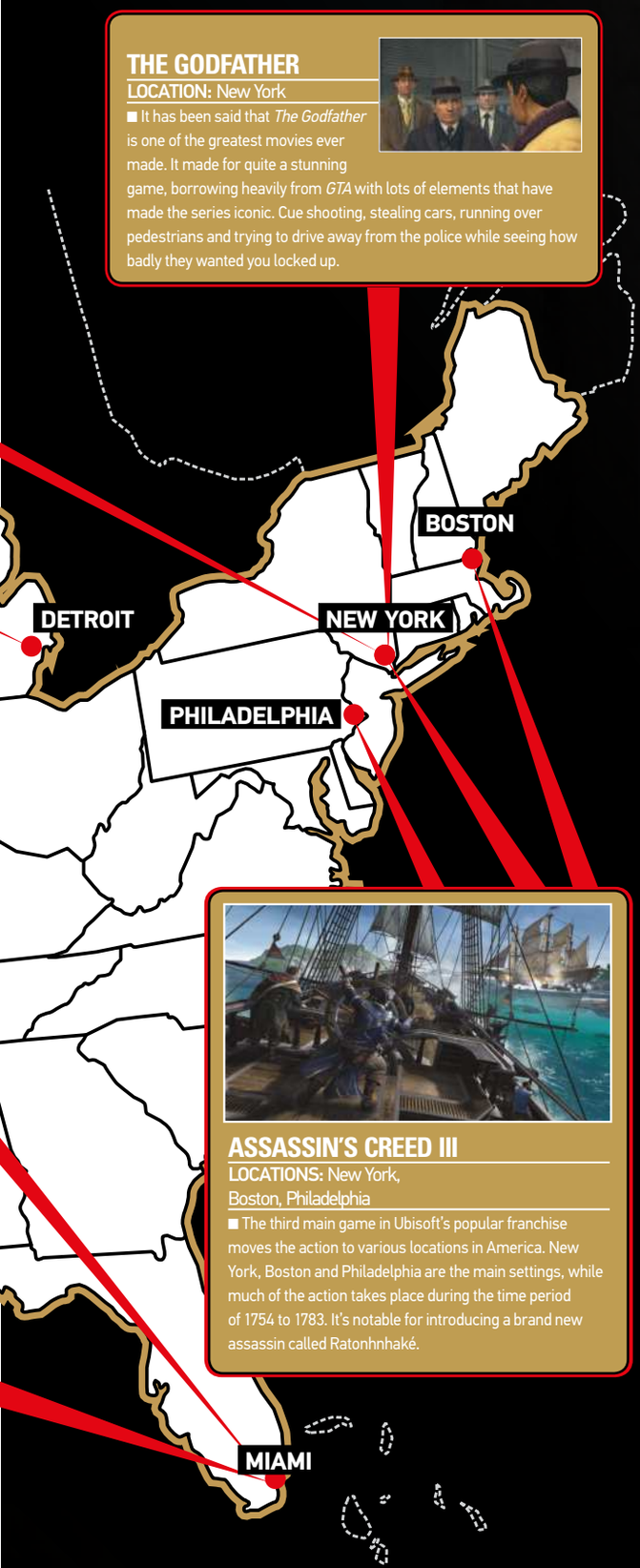
■ From Rockstar San Diego came *Red Dead Redemption*, a Western game where cars were replaced by horses. The dusty plains of America were at your feet and you could pick up missions and side-events at any time. It became a world in which you could virtually live.

SOUTHERN BORDER

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

LOCATION: Miami

■ A 2006 classic, Radical's film-to-game licence starring Tony Montana borrowed heavily from the open-world genre established in *GTA III* to the point where screenshots could easily be mistaken. The developer seemed to tick off all of the problems people had with *GTA* such as the targeting system and it made for a tighter game.



THE GODFATHER

LOCATION: New York

■ It has been said that *The Godfather* is one of the greatest movies ever made. It made for quite a stunning game, borrowing heavily from *GTA* with lots of elements that have made the series iconic. Cue shooting, stealing cars, running over pedestrians and trying to drive away from the police while seeing how badly they wanted you locked up.

ASSASSIN'S CREED III

LOCATIONS: New York, Boston, Philadelphia

■ The third main game in Ubisoft's popular franchise moves the action to various locations in America. New York, Boston and Philadelphia are the main settings, while much of the action takes place during the time period of 1754 to 1783. It's notable for introducing a brand new assassin called Ratonhnhaké.

» Explosions lent a cinematic, Hollywood blockbuster shine to the game and the open nature of it meant you could really explore.

"You'd seethe and grumble that someone had actually figured out how to pin a limo to a radio antenna"

Alan Campbell

▶ don't know what crazy thing the player is going to do to dump a spanner in the works of your carefully planned AI responses to mission triggers," says Alan. "You want to get your AI-controlled character on to a ship but then the player parks a truck blocking the only gangplank. Or wedges a car into a place that you can't imagine anyone ever wedging anything. Or just forgets about the mission altogether and simply goes off on a mad killing spree. And so on. When there are limitless possibilities, you can't plan for them all. Sometimes you need to resort to the old coder's maxim: 'wait till nobody's looking and then just fix it all in the background'. In other words, cheat."

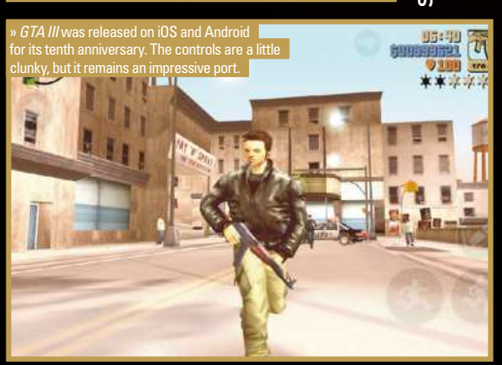
The team of play testers made the coders' lives miserable, Alan says, exposing the inadequacies of lovingly crafted, perfect code and showing its fragilities. "Every week the coders would be given lists, gleefully compiled by the play testers, detailing all the bugs discovered in their particular area," he adds. "So you'd work through the lists, seething and grumbling that someone had actually figured out how to pin a limo to a radio antenna, or whatever ridiculous thing it was that they'd done. And for a long time it seems like the lists never get shorter, but eventually they do. And then, one day, nobody gives you a list – and the game is finished."

As expected, even by the team, the game was critically well received and reviewers lavished it with praise. The release date was delayed for three weeks because the tragic events of 11 September 2001 had caused inevitable disruption for the American team leading the launch. Small changes were made too. The police cars lost their blue with white stripes that made them look similar to NYPD vehicles and instead took on a general black and white. Dan Houser revealed to *Edge* that a mission got chopped, a plane which looked like it could pass through a building was altered and some lines of radio dialogue were removed. Rockstar said the events of the day that America was rocked forced a "one per cent" change in the game out of sensitivity.

When it was released, it fast became the number one selling videogame of 2001 and it even took second place in 2002 after it became part of Sony's Greatest Hits program. Number one that year was *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, a game that was made straight after *GTA III* had shipped. Despite 11 million sales and becoming the first UK videogame to be recognised by the Entertainment & Leisure Software Publishers Association for selling more than a million copies in the UK, it attracted criticism, not least from moral guardians and writers on the *Daily Mail*, its violence being taken at face value by and large.

"I think everyone knew it was going to be successful," says Alan, regardless. "You couldn't play it without laughing out loud. In hindsight, I should probably have bought shares in Rockstar." But he believes they could have done some things differently. "We could have called the protagonist something other than Claude." ✱

» The developers had considered a first-person perspective but decided to go for the third-person viewpoint instead.



» *GTA III* was released on iOS and Android for its tenth anniversary. The controls are a little clunky, but it remains an impressive port.

Special thanks to Patricia Pucci for her help with this article

MAX PAYNE

To uncover a tale of development spanning two continents, James Churchill shoots the breeze with Peter Hajba and Scott Miller about bullet time, hitscanning and 3D animating via camcorder footage

» The face model for Max was the game's writer, Sam Lake.

As a camera tracks up an industrial skyscraper in a New York blizzard, Max Payne utters his first words of the game: "They were all dead. The final gunshot was an exclamation mark to everything that had led to this point. I released my finger from the trigger. And then it was over." This brilliantly set the stage for one of the most atmospheric and celebrated shooters ever made. A game that popularised bullet time within the action genre, and contained inspirations spanning film noir, Norse mythology, graphic novels and Hong Kong action movies, whilst interweaving the tale of Max's revenge for the murder of his family. In 2001, action games didn't come more badass than this.

But to make any sense of the trail leading up to the high-octane blockbuster hit, we need to go back to 1996, when *Max Payne* developers Remedy Entertainment had just released its first game for MS-DOS: *Death Rally,* a vehicular combat title that received mostly positive reviews. But for future efforts the company wished to expand. "Samuli Syvähuoko, the CEO of Remedy, called me and asked if I'd like to join them to work on a new game." says Peter Hajba, who was responsible for roles including animation, particle effects and texture art. "I was studying animation in a college in Dublin and was going to study for three years, but I accepted the offer and moved to Espoo." Like any young developer, the Finnish studio had humble beginnings. "Remedy was established in the basement of the house of one of our founders," Peter explains. "From there we proceeded to rent an office space. The atmosphere gradually slid from garage band to professional developer."

For its next venture Remedy wished to continue its working partnership with American-based publisher Apogee Software, which had transitioned to releasing all future games under the name 3D Realms. Apogee founder Scott Miller recalls Remedy's ambitious plans. "The creative minds at Remedy put together three project ideas that they wanted to present to me, to see if any of them looked promising as a full-blown game. One of them was

"The atmosphere [at Remedy] gradually slid from garage band to professional developer"
Peter Hajba

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** Rockstar Games, Apogee Software
- **DEVELOPER:** Remedy Entertainment
- **RELEASED:** 2002
- **PLATFORM:** PS2
- **GENRE:** Third-person shooter

a 3D racing game, one was a space battle RTS game that would have been a little like *Homeworld* had it ever come out, and the final idea was a top-down isometric shooter in the style of *Loaded*, which they were calling *Dark Justice*. Surprisingly to me, they had it in mind to make all three games at the same time!"

Scott's input as a veteran developer and publisher encouraged Remedy to solely develop the *Dark Justice* project. "I still remember the meeting I had with a group of the top Remedy execs who came to Dallas from Finland," he recalls. "I was selling them on the idea of building a strong character-driven franchise with a compelling story, unique character traits, and naming the game based on the lead character like we had done with *Duke Nukem*. At that first meeting I even said: 'Guys, if we're successful, there will be a film based on this character and his story.' And sure enough, that ended up happening."

But to achieve the success Scott outlined, a catchy marketable name was needed. "I finally came up with Max," Scott explains. "We had the last name, 'Heat', and although we all knew ▶

» The graphic novel sequences were made from retouching choreographed photoshoots.

WHERE'S LUPINO?
SCREW YA!
BAD START, VINNIE.
YA...YA CAN'T JUST HURT ME IN COLD BLOOD.
UH-H. JUST KEEP TELLING YOURSELF THAT.
I'M NOT GOING TO BE ANYBODY'S FALL GUY.
I WANT TO KNOW WHERE YOUR BOSS IS HIDING.

MAXED OUT

All the best moments from Remedy's dark and stylish shooter

THE PAYNE BEGINS

■ The first segment of the game sees Max arriving home only to witness the murder of his wife and daughter. It was originally intended to be a graphic novel cutscene, but making it playable pulls us into Max's bleak world view and helps us understand his determined course of revenge.

A TENDER MOMENT

■ An early chapter sees Max blast through a hotel filled with dingy sex rooms, only to find pimp gangster Rico Meurte and prostitute Candy Dawn in a moment of oral passion. They don't take kindly to Max's surprise intrusion, but the pair end up being all mouth and no trousers.

RAGNA ROCK

■ This Nordic-themed nightclub is one of the moodiest and unsettling environments in the game, having become a centre of sacrifice and occult worship. It builds to a chaotic gunfight against Jack Lupino, a man so insane he believes he can communicate with demons.

> "I was looking over this list of about 30 or 40 names and BOOM there was 'Payne' it was a 'holy shit' moment"
>
> Scott Miller

THE NIGHTMARE SEQUENCES

■ These are the most haunting sections of the game by far, featuring horrific visions of Max's old family home, where abnormally long corridors give way to dark voids lined with blood trails, all accompanied by the cries of Max's dead wife and daughter.

AESIR CORP

■ The final assault on this dark corporation constitutes a challenging, yet epic, series of showdowns featuring laser filled hallways, helicopter assaults and explosions aplenty. The beginning of the level also contains a gunfight in a lobby strikingly similar to a certain sci-fi bullet time action romp.

I KNOW KUNG FU

■ Like many PC games of the day, *Max Payne* had a large modding scene. One of the most fun was the 'Kung Fu' mod, giving Max access to martial arts techniques that only became cooler when combined with bullet time. It can still be downloaded for modern digital platforms.

» Sometimes the enemies looked laughable with their aburd expressions.

▶ it wasn't perfect, we went and got a trademark on 'Max Heat' mostly as a backup plan." Scott estimates this process cost $15,000, but 3D Realms and Remedy still sought perfection. "It finally arrived in an email from Remedy a month or so later. They had asked their internal team to submit the best last names they could think of, and I was looking over this list of about 30 to 40 names, and BOOM, there was Payne. It was a 'holy shit!' moment because I knew it was perfect."

With a new focus, the format of the game changed rapidly. "We abandoned the top-down perspective and switched to third-person," recalls Peter. "Also, the character and story started to get much better fleshed out once Sam Lake joined our ranks." One of the many narrative devices brought in by writer Sam Lake was the inclusion of graphic novel-style cutscenes. And although he focused the narrative into a powerful and troubled tale of vengeance, democracy was still present during story development. "Everyone contributed ideas," Peter explains. "All the characters and stories evolved in a rather organic manner; some details were added, considered, then dropped, while other aspects stuck and grew. In some earlier versions of the story, the Valkyr drug mutated people into monstrosities. But that was abandoned."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEATH RALLY
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1996

ALAN WAKE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: XBOX 360, PC
YEAR: 2010

AGENTS OF STORM
SYSTEM: IOS
YEAR: 2014

Whilst a memorable name and well-told narrative were crucial for success, the gameplay was equally, if not more, so. *Max Payne* is widely remembered for one trademark mechanic: bullet time. Although it was not the first game to feature slow motion during gun combat, it moulded it into a smooth system which could be easily controlled by the player. "This was one of my key contributions to the game," Scott proudly states. "I was visiting Remedy and they were showing me a very cool feature they'd added: slow motion enemy deaths. I was immediately struck with the idea that we needed to not just have this slow motion technology be cool eye candy, but that we needed to make it part of actual gameplay. My insistence on this idea got the Remedy team thinking about how to do it, and I suggested having a button the player could press that would shift the game into slow motion mode, with the exception that Max could still aim in real time." But as Scott reveals, this was the main reason that multiplayer was left out. "The best we could come up with was that the bullet time effect was localised to within 40 feet of the player, so players outside this bubble remained in normal time. But it's hard to make part of the game appear to

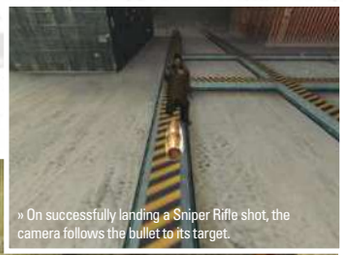
» Peter named Eadweard Muybridge's book, *The Human Figure In Motion*, as an animating influence.

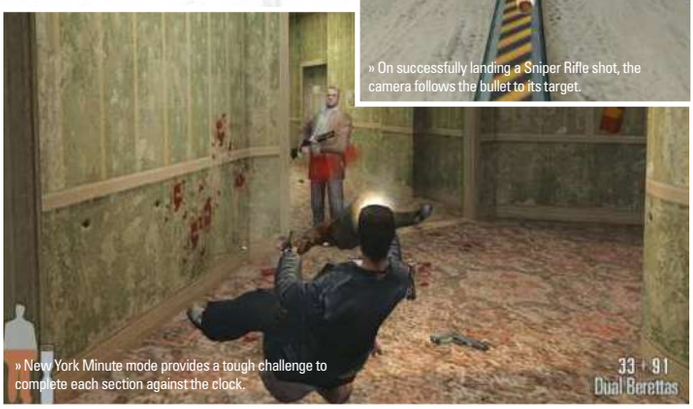
go slow, while another part still goes at normal speed."

However, the experience didn't suffer, with bullet time being coincidentally enhanced by an earlier design decision: the rejection of the traditional hitscanning method seen in shooting games. "Hitscan is a technique that, in the most simple terms, means that when a gun is fired, an immediate invisible straight line is drawn from the gun to the first object it hits, whether an enemy, object, or wall," Scott explains. "In effect, the bullet moves instantaneously through the environment, while real bullets travel between 700 to 1200 miles an hour. So, as a way to make *Max Payne* a more realistic game, an early idea I pitched to Remedy was to not use the hitscan method, but to model the bullets travelling at a more realistic speed through the environment."

Remedy took the bullet time mechanic even further by adding cinematic and stylish dives that the player could execute. "Initially, Max's shoot/dodge dive could be done in one direction only," explains Peter. "Once you chose which way to dive, you couldn't change your aim much, as rotating the whole character sideways would have looked very odd. But then our texture artist, Teemu Heinilehto, wrote a 'wouldn't it be cool if…' email to everyone, proposing that the player should be able to aim in any direction after executing a dive, and surely this could be done by blending the animations. So we spent quite a bit of time and effort on this mechanic, and the result was a blend of eight dive animations. Dive in one direction and turn any way you want. We couldn't quite cover aiming up and down in a dive, but still, doing 360 degree turning was already quite an improvement!"

» The Game Boy Advance port was programmed by Mobius Entertainment, which later became Rockstar Leeds.


» On successfully landing a Sniper Rifle shot, the camera follows the bullet to its target.



» New York Minute mode provides a tough challenge to complete each section against the clock.

Due to limited resources, Peter and the rest of the team had to get creative to make the game happen. "The character animations were sort of rotoscoped. We recorded some video footage with a DV camcorder in a gym, with our friend performing some dives for us, plus the usual running cycles and some death bodyfalls. I then took that video tape, and used an abandoned video editing deck VCR to look through the motions frame by frame on a TV screen, and animating the characters by hand accordingly. First the key poses, then refining the details. You see, back then motion capture was rare, noisy and super expensive." But it wasn't the only source of inspiration for Peter. "I realised I didn't have to rely on our own footage, I could also watch some Hong Kong action movies and see how the stuntmen performed their deaths, so I manually animated some death animations based on those."

And it wasn't only character movement which was sourced from outside influences. To accurately capture the look of New York City, Remedy staff members travelled to the famous metropolis, using photographs to create textures for the in-game environments. "There were many trends in the game industry at the time, and 'use photos for more realistic results' was one of them," states Peter. "It was simpler back then because we had no normal maps or bump maps; you didn't have to account for false lighting cues. The lighting and shading was baked into the colour/diffuse maps. Done. To get perfect results you'd have to abide to very strict rules in lighting when taking the photos, but back then the game industry was still quite homebrew, garage tech, hire-your-friends kind of pioneering."

» Max's death will result in a circling camera as he holds a painful grimace.

With the lack of motion capture accompanied by a modest budget, the team had to pool every resource possible to create character models. As Peter reveals, "because we decided to use photo textures, we needed faces to photograph. The Remedy staff were the closest people we could find. The people in the neighbouring companies in the same office complex and friends of the development team were the second closest. I somehow avoided having my face in *Max Payne*, but my father ended up in the game as one of B.B.'s mobs in the parking garage scene."

Even though there were many jobs to juggle, Peter looks back fondly on the experience. "I appreciated the diversity of tasks – every day was different, and if one task was blocked, I could switch into something different." In the end, everyone's hard graft paid off. The combination of action gameplay, slick cinematics and a narrative fuelled by rebellious desperation proved to be a winner, with *Max Payne* selling over 4 million copies. It's handling of bullet time and gunplay hugely influenced the action genre, with echoes of its design still being seen today. "We all had high hopes," recalls Peter. "But it was still a surprise to have it succeed so well. Also, it meant we could keep our jobs!" *

PAYNEFUL SEQUELS
More madness from Max

MAX PAYNE (GBA) 2003
■ This handheld port of *Max Payne* was surprisingly good considering the limitations of the Game Boy Advance's hardware. Placing the action in an isometric viewpoint, this version kept most of the comic book cutscenes with their voice overs, but removed the nightmare sequences, 3D cutscenes and most of the soundtrack. However, it could definitely satisfy any fan curiosity.

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE 2003
■ The sequel continued Max's troubled tale in the form of a noir love story, complete with a deeper bullet time system and improved visuals. However, it turned out to be a little on the short side and the narrative slightly lacked the desperate tone of the first game. However, it's still a great title worthy of anyone's time.

MAX PAYNE 3 2012
■ Rockstar Games developed the third *Max Payne* offering. Although not a bad game by any stretch, it's a far cry from the cold harsh environments of New York City, instead focusing on a broken down Max under the sunny skies of Sao Paulo. It was the first game in the series to feature online multiplayer.

MAX PAYNE (FILM) 2008
■ Cinematic treatments of videogames have never been kind, usually stooping to the lowest common denominator with a total lack of disregard for the original source material. *Max Payne* is among the worst of these, with horrible dialogue, pacing, and acting in the form of boredom-peddler Mark Wahlberg as Max. And for some reason it also features demonic winged creatures.

Castlevania

Symphony of the Night

Many 3D-obsessed gamers thought Konami was mad when it decided to make a 2D Castlevania for Sony's powerful PlayStation. The Japanese developer had the last laugh, thanks to its genre-busting game. Damien McFerran discovers how it all happened…

» The bat transformation allows Alucard to enter previously inaccessible areas.

Regular readers of Retro Gamer may have noticed that we harbour something of a soft spot for Konami's splendid gothic adventure *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. We gleefully leap on any excuse to mention it and will happily print screenshots at the slightest provocation, only Capcom's *Strider* features more prominently. In our defence, the blood-sucking platform romp remains one of the most truly essential pieces of 32-bit software and has justifiably attained near-legendary status within the already classic-filled *Castlevania* canon. Even now, nearly twenty years after its debut, it remains not only the best game in the series, but one of the finest Metroidvanias to ever be created. With that in mind, we felt it was the perfect opportunity to speak with Koji 'IGA' Igarashi (who was series producer at the time) about the development of what many deem to be the crowning glory of a highly esteemed franchise.

IGA was responsible for the welfare of *Castlevania* lineage and has recently overseen the production of two excellent Nintendo DS episodes in the shape of *Dawn Of Sorrow* and *Portrait Of Ruin*. He also oversaw the less successful *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair*. He joined Konami in the early-Nineties and worked on a variety of titles before becoming part of the *Castlevania* team prior to the development of *Symphony Of The Night*. The game represented a significant turning point for the series. With the exception of the free-roaming *Simon's Quest* on the NES, over a decade's worth of instalments had displayed an unwavering commitment to the fairly straightforward 'platform action' template, which saw the player utilising the legendary 'Vampire Killer' whip to send all manner of nocturnal beasties packing. Contrary to popular belief, IGA was not employed as primary director on the project – that honour fell to Toru Hagihara, who was also responsible for the excellent *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* on NEC's PC Engine Super CD-ROM system (which incidentally is the direct prequel to *Symphony Of The Night*). However, IGA served as assistant director as well as participating in the writing of the scenario and general programming, so it could be argued that he had the most telling influence over proceedings.

It was apparent from the outset that Konami wished to steer the franchise in a fresh, new direction. "Action games could be cleared in a short time, but I wished to create a game that could be enjoyed for a much longer period," explains IGA. Taking inspiration from Nintendo's SNES classic *Super Metroid*, the team decided to shy away from the stage-by-stage concept of previous titles and cultivate a totally open, free-roaming castle for the player to explore. Hardy adventurers were initially denied access to every portion of Vlad's sprawling, demonic fortress from the outset, but thanks to a finely tuned drip feed of abilities – ranging from the humble double-jump to unique shape-shifting enchantments – they would gradually gain entry to more sections of the ageing citadel as progression was made. For example, at various points in the castle the way forward would be barred by iron grilles. To continue, the player had to collect a relic that would permit them to alter their appearance to that of a fine mist, therefore allowing them to pass effortlessly through the obstacle. Another area – a tunnel covered in deadly spikes – could only be traversed when in 'bat' form. These puzzles were not particularly demanding but they resulted in a game that rewarded exploration and proved to be a supremely involving and enjoyable experience, while thankfully retaining the classic hack-and-slash action that aficionados of the series held so dear.

» The bells! The bells!

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **» DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
- **» RELEASED:** 1997
- **» PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PSP, XBLA

» This looks a strange place for candlesticks if you ask us.

"Action games could be cleared in a short time, but I wished to create a game that could be enjoyed for a much longer period"

Koji 'IGA' Igarashi

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

» **DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD** (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: (PC ENGINE CD-ROM)
YEAR: 1993

» **METAL GEAR SOLID**
SYSTEMS: (PSX)
YEAR: 1998

» **NANO BREAKER**
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2005

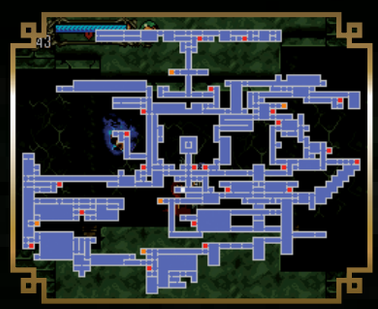
» The epic final encounter with Big Daddy Dracula.

» Flying crucifixes can take your eye out, lad.

» Michiru Yamane and Koji 'IGA' Igarashi.

▶ Another major innovation was the introduction of role-playing mechanics. This particular evolution was borne out of the common perception that the series was something of a tough nut in terms of challenge, as IGA explains: "I wanted to change the impression that *Castlevania* was this difficult-to-access action game. When we decided to adopt RPG elements, we agreed that users should receive something good when beating enemies. So I thought of adding Experience Points to the game." For the first time in the series, players could enhance their chances of victory by levelling up and augmenting their character with a vast array of powerful weapons, armour and spells. The concept of earning experience for every enemy successfully slain also prevented the inevitable back-tracking from becoming too arduous, and in many ways made the game more accessible for less skilled gamers. "I thought that even the users who were not good at playing this type of action game would be able to clear *Symphony Of The Night* if I adopted this particular system," continues IGA. Some fans would later complain that the developer was slightly too successful in this regard and actually made the game too easy, and when compared to the stubborn, almost sadistic challenge represented by previous titles (NES *Castlevania*, we're looking at you), they had a point. Regardless of this, *Symphony* still possessed many hours of playtime within the dank, crumbling walls of Dracula's stronghold. The map screen was massive to begin with, but if certain parameters were met the player could teleport to a second castle – an inverted, upside down version of the first – and continue the valiant quest. This effectively doubled the size of the game and the 'proper' ending – one of several – could only be accessed when this second castle was beaten. The introduction of a multitude of useful items, including healing potions, food and one-shot weaponry imbued *Symphony* with a depth unlike anything else experienced in such a title. The urge to collect every trinket, explore the attack possibilities of every weapon, and cover every inch of the evil stronghold proved irresistible for many.

Not content with shaking things up gameplay wise, IGA also turned a few heads when it came to selecting the lead character for the game. Traditionally, the vampire-hunting Belmont clan took centre stage in *Castlevania* titles but *Symphony* saw the player controlling the half-vampire, half-human offspring of Dracula himself, Alucard. "I decided to choose a character that had a special link to the previous *Castlevania* titles," comments IGA. Alucard (Dracula spelt backwards) had appeared as a secondary character in the brilliant NES game *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* – which IGA cites as his favourite entry in the



» The map screen takes inspiration from *Super Metroid.*

"The world of the vampire that I have in my mind is beautiful and fleeting with blood and darkness. The series had a visual image featuring hostility"

Koji 'IGA' Igarashi

» **Left:** The abysmal American cover artwork. **Middle:** Ayami Kojima's striking artwork for the Japanese release. **Right:** The Euro release thankfully retained Kojima's stunning work, but sold poorly.

» Who's the man? Shaft! Ahem.

entire series – where he fought alongside the heroic Trevor Belmont to prevent his patriarch's murderous revival. After sealing this important victory he made the decision to place himself in indefinite hibernation to prevent his cursed bloodline from causing humanity any further mischief. Resurrecting the 'Tragic Prince' for *Symphony* proved an inspired move, but IGA reveals that, at the time, he was concerned that such a sweeping change would anger the fans. "Personally, I liked Alucard very much and it was totally fine with me, but I presumed that those who had been fans for a long time would be angry with our decision since it was the first time the series ever had a non-whip-using character as a hero." In hindsight, he needn't have worried – the fans took to the new lead like a duck to water. "The Japanese title was *Akumajo Dracula X*. I used 'X' to show that it would be apart from the main stream of the series, but surprisingly, it has now become the mainstream," he comments with a degree of satisfaction. Alucard is now regarded as one of the most popular characters in the *Castlevania* universe and IGA is well aware of the contribution he made to the ultimate triumph of *Symphony*. "Alucard was just a really cool hero, and that is why I think *Symphony Of The Night* has been received so favourably by the fans." Nevertheless, in order to appease those few stubborn traditionalists that might have been offended by a vampire taking centre stage, IGA thoughtfully included the option to play as Richter Belmont, albeit as an unlockable extra.

Regardless of the changes being made elsewhere, one aspect of the game retained the brilliance of former titles: the epic boss encounters. In keeping with the grand vision IGA and his team strived to attain, *Symphony* was packed to bursting point with some of the most creative and visually stunning 2D bosses ever witnessed. Many of these fiendish creations were able to trace their roots right back to the NES instalments of the series – the towering Galamoth previously appeared in the disarmingly cute *Castlevania* spin-off *Kid Dracula*, and hardcore fans should have no trouble remembering which other games Medusa, Werewolf and Frankenstein's Monster have cropped up in before. "My favourite is definitely Beelzebub," replies IGA when pressed about which boss he rates highest. Indeed, this particular enemy proved to be one of the most memorable in the entire game, taking the form of a gigantic, rotting corpse suspended on rusty meat hooks. Victory could only be gained by hacking away at his putrid, decomposing limbs while avoiding the unwelcome attention of several massive mutated flies. When you consider the limited RAM of Sony's 32-bit console and the poor reputation it had for hosting 2D titles, it makes IGA's achievements all the more impressive.

The Castlevania franchise has always had a reputation for high-quality musical accompaniment and *Symphony* is no exception. Indeed, Many consider Michiru Yamane's work to be the finest ever heard in the series. With this in mind, did IGA ever feel that the expectation of aural excellence imposed limitations on his development? "The music direction has never led the creation of the game," he states. "I have always asked Michiru to compose music in accordance with the actual game and never the other way around. She always co-ordinated with the development team and composed music from the image of the stages." When asked which tune was his favourite, IGA playfully admits that he's slightly biased: "My favourite is *Castle Dracula* which starts to play when Alucard enters the castle for the very first time. I was impressed with the way the music starts to play once Alucard enters the dark castle, and then suddenly the castle gets bright and zombies start to appear. It might be because that particular part of the game was programmed by myself." Yamane's soundtrack was a fusion of rock, jazz and classical styles that appeared hopelessly mismatched on paper but worked surprisingly well in practice. Standout tracks included *Strange Bloodlines*, which played over Richter's battle with Dracula in the prelude; *Wood Carving Partita*, a string-based composition that wouldn't have sounded out of place in a Hollywood period piece; and *Requiem For The Gods*, a largely vocal track which accompanied the Church section of the castle. The musical package was rounded off rather neatly by Rika Muranaka's heart-wrenching *I am the Wind*, which plays over the end credits. It was sung by American Cynthia Harrell, who also performed vocal duties on the infamously camp title theme of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. Unsurprisingly, the soundtrack CD remains popular with fans a decade after it was published.

The introduction of Ayami Kojima's sumptuous artwork was the icing on an already tantalisingly gorgeous cake. Again, a desire to establish a new vision for the series was the main reason behind her involvement as IGA explains: "The world of the vampire that I have in my mind is beautiful and fleeting with blood and ▶

FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES

In 2007, Konami released *Symphony Of The Night* on XBLA. In the same year it produced an updated version of the acclaimed PC Engine instalment *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* – this will be the first time the game has been officially published outside Japan. Similar to Capcom's PSP game *Extreme Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, the game uses a brand new 2.5D graphic engine, updated character designs from Ayami Kojima and an all-new soundtrack. Some would argue that the best thing regarding this momentous release was the announcement that the original versions of both *Rondo* and *Symphony* will feature as unlockable extras, which means fans could play *Symphony* on the move for the first time ever. *Symphony Of The Night* was also made available on Sony's PSN service, meaning PS3 owners could also enjoy Konami's groundbreaking adventure game.

» Richter tackles a giant Vlad in the gripping prologue.

▶ darkness. The series had a visual image featuring hostility, but I tried to change the image since the game concept itself was going to change," he continues. Kojima's mature and astonishingly detailed art elevated the game to a whole new level of brilliance, and for once the series was granted a cohesive image that has endured ever since. Her combination of Japanese sensibility with classical painting methods resulted in some of the most breathtakingly stunning artwork ever attributed to a videogame release and it's testament to her truly wonderful talent that when a new *Castlevania* title is announced you can bet that one of the first questions to flash across internet forums worldwide is 'Has Kojima done the artwork?' Just check out our front cover if you need further proof of her incredible skill.

With this amalgamation of fantastic gameplay, stupefying depth, gorgeous design and a downright brilliant musical score, it's unsurprising that *Symphony* went on to sell thousands in Japan where it was released as *Akumajo Dracula X: Gekka no Yasoukyoku (Demon Castle Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight).* Huge sales and heaps of critical acclaim were also prevalent when the game debuted in the US but it perplexingly failed to replicate this success in Europe. Reports vary but it is believed that the initial print run for the PAL version was around the 15,000 mark and many of these copies had to be heavily discounted by disappointed stores before they eventually sold. It's been argued that lukewarm reviews in the UK press – several magazines dismissed it as a 16-bit game on 32-bit hardware – contributed to the dour performance at retail, but whatever the cause, Konami knew it had a turkey on its hands and consequently didn't produce any more PAL copies. Meanwhile, in Japan and the US the game was reprinted several times in order to satisfy demand and was eventually granted best-seller status in both territories. The low number of PAL units, coupled with the fact that most came with highly desirable limited-edition items (see Bonus Stage) has recently caused prices to soar – it's not unusual for mint and complete Euro editions to fetch three figures on eBay, while the NTSC versions struggle to scrape £10.

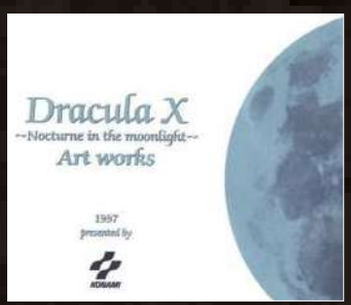
A year after the PlayStation release, *Symphony* was ported to Sega Saturn by Konami's Nagoya studio (not the original team, it should be noted). On paper this promised to be the definitive *Symphony* – the raw 2D clout of Sega's 32-bit machine combined with Konami's boast that it intended to add a raft of exciting features (such as an additional playable character in the form of Maria Renard, two new castle areas and a smattering of additional items) resulted in fans being whipped into a frenzy of anticipation. Unfortunately, the eventual release was something of a disappointment. The gorgeous transparency and lighting effects so abundant in the PlayStation original had been replaced by unsightly cross-hatch textures (Saturn infamously struggled with these kinds of effects) and the game was afflicted with bouts of crippling slowdown when the on-screen action became too hectic. The much-hyped new levels were also distinctly underwhelming and were populated by some seriously daft new enemy sprites – the deranged horticulturalist in the Underground Garden instantly springs to mind – and consequently the Saturn port remains a purchase only hardcore fans should seriously consider making. Sega's 32-bit machine had all but given up the ghost in the West by the time the conversion was released in 1998 and as a result it never made it officially outside of Japan (although a Western release was mentioned several times in Sega's own promotional material). This has elevated prices to levels that almost rival that of the PAL PlayStation version.

Interestingly, around the same time another conversion was announced for Tiger's ill-fated Game.com handheld

» The Sega Saturn version featured some rather silly enemies.

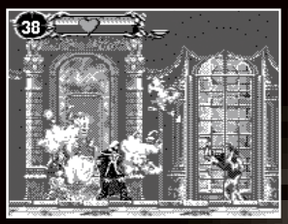
» If dying wasn't enough, these poor skeletons have been relegated to skull-bearing status.

BONUS STAGE



Two bonus items were produced by Konami and bundled with *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* in varying quantities across the three main territories. The first was a small book, which featured a black-and-white illustrated prelude to the game and some lovely full-colour character artwork courtesy of Ayami Kojima. Initially intended solely for the Japanese market (it reads from right to left, as is Japanese custom, and is entitled '*Dracula X: Nocturne In The Moonlight*') the book was eventually carried across to the American and PAL markets too. The second item is a CD, which contains a selection of tracks from various titles in the *Castlevania* series. Both items are highly sought after by fans and the art book alone has been known to fetch £50 on eBay. Amazingly, these items were bundled with the PAL version from launch but were only available to those who pre-ordered in NTSC territories.

> **"I was not involved in the actual conversion, but I think it was hard since I gave so many tough requests"**
>
> Koji 'IGA' Igarashi



» Screens from the abandoned port for Tiger's ill-advised Game.com console.

» An advert for the cancelled Game.com conversion.

platform. Envisaged as a competitor to Nintendo's all-conquering Game Boy, the Game.com boasted rudimentary touch-screen technology and basic online functions, but neither of these potentially groundbreaking features were utilised effectively and a flood of lacklustre software resulted in the monochrome console flopping disastrously at retail. Tiger threw in the towel and development on the *Symphony Of The Night* port (which was being handled in-house by Tiger itself) was brought to an abrupt halt. Beyond a handful of screenshots it's not known exactly how far they got – the official line is that it was half finished, but some sceptics have gone as far as to speculate that the screens were simply mock-ups created in order to generate badly needed public interest in the doomed portable. No playable code has appeared in the intervening years so it's unlikely that it was anywhere near completion and the promise of a portable *Symphony* has only recently been fulfilled (see Fangs For The Memories).

Nearly two decades have passed since the world laid eyes on this astounding piece of electronic entertainment, yet interest is still as strong as ever with many devotees adamant that *Symphony* represents the pinnacle of the entire *Castlevania* franchise – no mean feat when you consider the gloriously high benchmark set by past titles like *Super Castlevania IV* and *Dracula X: Rondo Of Blood* and more recent entries such the Hideo Kojima produced *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*. "I am really proud that it has been evaluated as such," comments IGA with a completely justified sense of pride. However, the man who was once responsible for the future of one of Konami's most valuable franchises steadfastly refuses to rest on his laurels: "I cannot say it was the best since I think I need to always make every endeavour to create better games for everyone to enjoy."

As previously mentioned, the XBLA release of *Symphony* was released in 2007. Programming duties were carried out by emulation expert Digital Eclipse which has previously impressed with several highly accurate and well-received retro compilations. Although IGA is not directly involved, he admits that he has been badgering the developer to ensure it gets superlative results. "I was not involved in the actual conversion, so I don't know much about it, but I think it was hard since I gave so many tough requests to the conversion team when we first handed them the project." There has been talk of various graphical improvements being included and the epic adventure will be the first to break Microsoft's self-imposed 50MB limit for Live Arcade content – an indication of how committed it is to ensuring the port is as faithful as possible. IGA has the utmost confidence in the ability of Digital Eclipse. "I am sure it deserves to be downloaded and played, and hopefully it will reach a brand new audience," he states categorically. Does this brave new method of software distribution intrigue the *Castlevania* producer and does he foresee the possibility of more titles from the series being made available for download? "I am very interested in the online distribution and look forward to it, but that's all I can say for now," he replies enigmatically. One thing is certain – the acclaimed franchise is in very good hands. *

AYAMI KOJIMA

Self-taught illustrator Kojima is now so inexorably linked with the *Castlevania* franchise that it's easy to forget that she's only been involved since *Symphony Of The Night*. Kojima started her career by illustrating novel covers, and branched into videogames in 1997 with *Symphony* and the Koei Sega Saturn strategy title *Söldnerschild*. Her contribution to *Symphony* made her something of legend among *Castlevania* enthusiasts and she went on to create further artwork for *Castlevania Chronicles* (PSOne), *Harmony Of Dissonance*/*Concerto Of The Midnight Sun* (GBA), *Aria Of Sorrow*/*Minuet Of Dawn* (GBA), *Lament Of Innocence* (PS2) and *Curse Of Darkness* (PS2/Xbox). Her somewhat unique representation of the male form – highly feminine with lithe bodies and long, flowing locks – has caused consternation among some sectors of *Castlevania* fandom as her work has proven especially appealing to female Shonen-ai (young man love) manga addicts.

» Beelzebub is Iga's favourite boss. After fighting against him, it's easy to see why.

» Alucard stops for a quick breather and a lecture from an irate ghost.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

» The final fight with The Boss is a home run for Kojima in every single sense.

INFO

- **Year:** 2005
- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Developer:** In-house
- **Key People:** Hideo Kojima (director), Yoji Shinkawa (character designer), Harry Gregson-Williams (composer)

GO DEEPER

- ***Metal Gear Solid 3*** **is one of the few PS2 games to feature downloadable content, letting players add camouflage options to their inventory.**
- **Upon the game's reveal at E3 2003, Kojima referenced *GTA: Vice City* and showed Snake's failed attempt to steal a motorbike in a scene that didn't make the game.**

Hideo Kojima's greatest game to date plunged Snake into a jungle at the height of the Cold War, transforming the dynamic of his fan-favourite stealth series...

THE BACKGROUND

One main factor would determine the jungle setting of *Metal Gear Solid 3*: series creator Hideo Kojima felt like he could accomplish such an environment on PS2 where he couldn't before. Kojima and his team visited rainforests to research this backdrop; composer Harry Gregson-Williams was pleased, since during interviews for *MGS2* he jokingly mentioned he'd return to the series if it was set in the jungle – by coincidence, Kojima already had the setting in mind.

Kojima would bring Snake back in *MGS3* after a lot of players complained about Raiden in its predecessor, while the director also noted criticisms of the length of *Sons Of Liberty* in making *MGS3*. It was only later revealed that this Snake would in fact be Big Boss, villain from the first *Metal Gear* and the character cloned to create Solid Snake, in an instalment set many years before the other games. The camera was a tricky issue for Kojima – at first he wanted consistency across the three titles, so he opted for the classic top-down view in *MGS3*'s original release. However, when the time came to make *MGS3: Subsistence*, a 2006 enhanced version of *Snake Eater*, he included a new third-person camera that was the final stretch towards making it a timeless experience. *Subsistence* would also add a multiplayer mode that found a limited audience.

THE GAME

If a sequel ever felt like a reaction to the reception of its predecessor, it's *Metal Gear Solid 3*. *Metal Gear Solid 2* was accused of being philosophically bloated, overburdened with baffling cut-scenes and for misfiring completely by replacing its iconic main character with a whiny rookie, the much-maligned blonde child soldier mess Raiden. *Metal Gear Solid 3*'s jungle setting is the purest iteration of Kojima's experiments with stealth-based gameplay, allowing players to daub Snake in camouflage and creep through raw, wild scenery,

Things of note

This... is the end

The End boss fight is very smart, as you search for the ageing sniper's heavy breathing with a directional microphone. Changing the clock on the PS2 can make him die of old age.

Subsistence> Snake Eater

The Subsistence release of *MGS3* came with both a new camera and re-releases of *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* on MSX, and is availanble in the *MGS HD Collection*.

Starsailor, Stellastarr

Kojima ended up choosing Starsailor's *Way To Fall* to close out *Snake Eater* by accident. "I think that life is improved by these little accidents," Kojima recalled on his blog.

Young Ocelot

A young Revolver Ocelot's appearance in *MGS3* is obviously designed for the delight of fans – that this veteran villain was once a petulant soldier who lacked panache in combat.

The Bond Opening

The setting and the fact that Snake is a spy tie into a loose *Bond* theme in *MGS3*, underlined by the opening credits, which combine an OTT *Bond*-like theme tune with imagery of snakes.

» The jungle imagery is employed to maximum effect throughout the story.

» The Sorrow forces players to meet the spirits of all those they have killed.

» Being chased out of the military base is a thrilling on-rails shooter section.

What the press thought

games™ Score: 8/10

"While certain recent games handle storytelling better than this, there remains a certain charm and magic about *Snake Eater* that just can't be found in titles without Kojima's Midas touch. It's a game that nobody else would dare make and that works for and against it."

while having to maintain Snake's well-being by keeping his body injury free and his stomach full of anything they can scrounge around the world.

MGS3's range of ideas is an extraordinary contrast to the five hours of bomb freezing in *MGS2* – set pieces in abundance, a number of astonishing boss fights and a genuinely engaging story colour an intelligently crafted 15+ hour journey.

Boss fights, as ever, form the crux of the way that narrative plays out. Of the members of Cobra Unit, individually created around a single emotion, the best three encounters are with The End, The Sorrow and The Boss. The End is a breathtakingly tense sniper fight with a dying old soldier that can last anywhere between five minutes and many hours – lose track of him and Snake can even be taken hostage by The End and wake up in prison. The Sorrow is a passive encounter where players have to walk down a river populated by the ghosts of every soldier Snake has killed up until that point, an ingenious pacing turn that shines a rare morality on the player's actions.

Then there's Volgin, armed with electric powers, a nuclear-powered tank called the Shagohod and aggressive sexual tendencies, who more or less fulfils the traditional role of a main *MGS* villain, with a terrific three-part fight that incorporates a brilliant on-rails chase sequence as well.

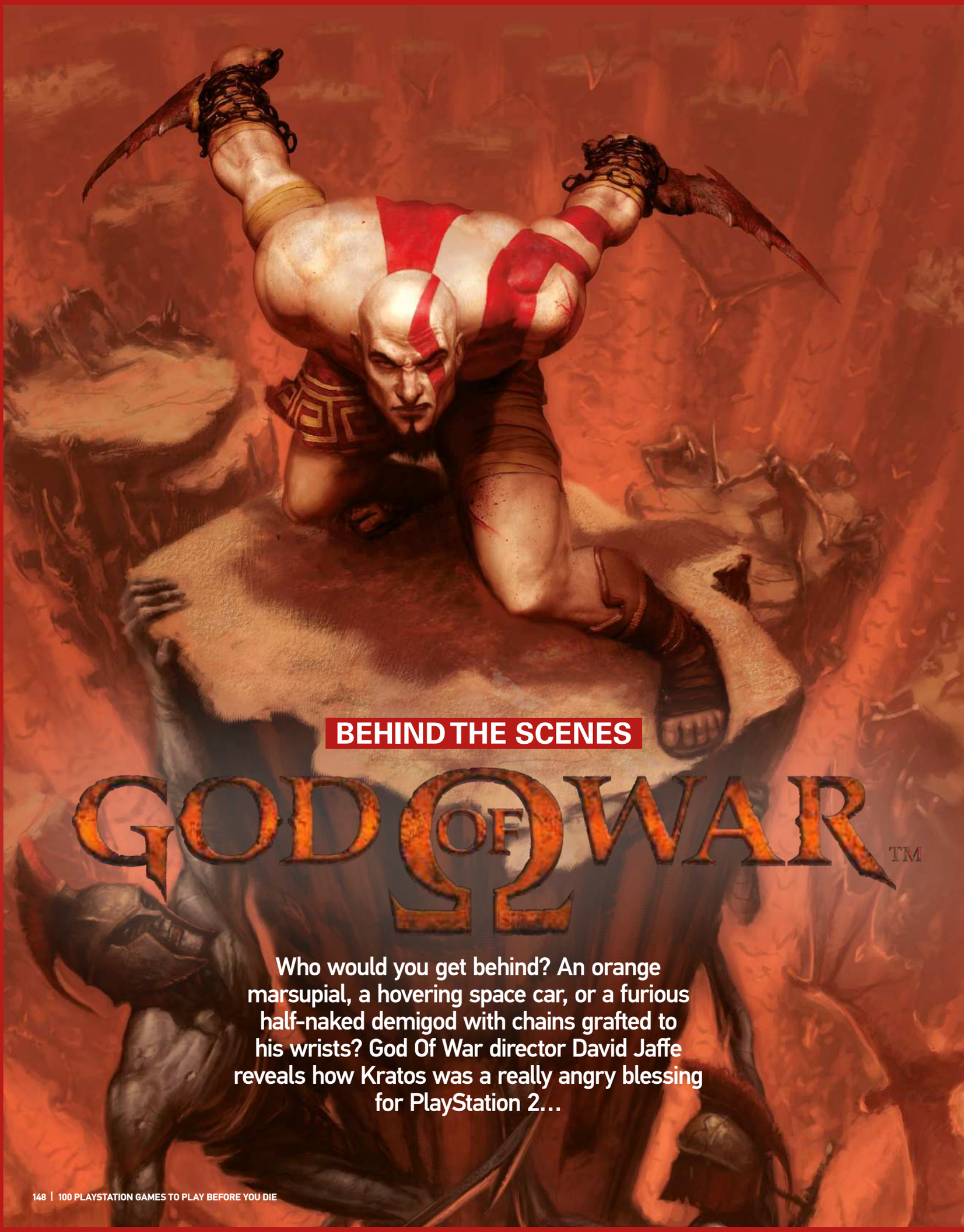
Yet it's the inevitable battle with The Boss, Snake's mentor who betrays him and defects early in the story, that defies the traditional role of a boss fight and therefore is the most interesting part of *Snake Eater*, both in characterisation and the way the fight is presented. The Boss is portrayed as an enemy throughout *MGS3*, though not unambiguously, a soldier with conviction in her actions that a conflicted Snake knows he must kill.

Ultimately, the demise of The Boss, who understands the politics of war far better than Snake does, is part of the gut-wrenching twist finale of *MGS3* that turns the entire story on its head, a climax that is easily among the very best ever created for a videogame. Snake's notions of loyalty and patriotism are soured forever by the events and revelations that occur – and you too, as a player, leave *MGS3* with a feeling of heartbreak, as Kojima cleverly ties together a tale that's far sharper than we're used to from the director. And there's the jungle. The sound of animals in the distance, leaves rustling with nearby snakes and the future Big Boss lying in a pit of mud, trying to avoid detection. These tense encounters, in a distinctive world ambitiously realised by Konami, are the foundation of the eccentric magic in *MGS3*.

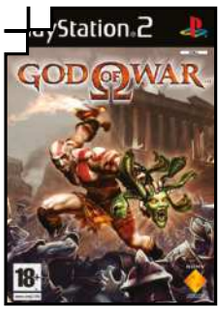
WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Kojima does make it very easy for people to criticise his storytelling. His games tend to have an over-reliance on cut-scenes, the lengths of which are at times self-indulgent, while his skill with characterisation is often buried within concepts that nobody cares about, the likes of which spoiled *MGS2* and *MGS4*. *Snake Eater*, however, illustrates that Kojima is a better storyteller than anyone else in his field when everything lines up, merging narrative and game design in ways that can have powerful emotional effects on the player.

Metal Gear Solid 3 stands clear of the rest of Kojima's bonkers saga, and it's quite obviously better for it. No burden to continue the story down the line (though he has), no encroaching mythology from previous games – a self-contained, intelligently-created summation of everything Kojima excels at as a designer and a storyteller. ✱



Who would you get behind? An orange marsupial, a hovering space car, or a furious half-naked demigod with chains grafted to his wrists? God Of War director David Jaffe reveals how Kratos was a really angry blessing for PlayStation 2…



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SONY
» **DEVELOPER:** SONY SANTA MONICA
» **RELEASED:** 2005
» **PLATFORM:** PS2

Mascots come in all shapes and sizes. If there were some perfect creation process, chances are the most successful gaming heroes of all time wouldn't be an out-of-shape plumber and a hedgehog that isn't even the right colour. No, there's no science to it all, hence why we probably shouldn't be all that surprised that Sony's unexpected mascot for the PS2 era came in the form of gaming's angriest man. The last great example of a platform holder giving one of its studios almost full creative control over a project could easily have gone so badly wrong, but the history books tell us otherwise – *God Of War* managed to make ancient history exciting for a whole new audience, just as *Clash Of The Titans* had done nearly 25 years earlier, with cutting edge technology once again at the forefront of bringing legends back to life and capturing the imaginations of a generation.

Strange to think, then, that *God Of War* might never have existed had one of the other options on the table at the time been given the green light first. Founding father of the franchise, game director and personable semi-automatic cuss rifle David Jaffe talks us through some of the other options and, with all due respect, it isn't hard to see why Kratos came out on top. "I was looking at a game – we were calling it *Dead Man* at the time – and it was an open-world first-person game," he reveals. "It wasn't exactly survival horror – it wasn't so slow-paced – but it was trying to do like an action-adventure set in the Louisiana swamps and bayou about voodoo and supernatural powers, so the character would have these abilities and powers. I liked the idea of doing an open-world, first-person game and there hadn't been a lot of those at the time." Given that *Shadow Man* never exactly took off to the degree Acclaim would have hoped and the technical limitations of PS2, we can't say we're entirely surprised to hear that *Dead Man* never got off the ground.

"Another one that didn't get as far came from us talking a lot about trying to create a way for gameplay to evoke the same kind of emotions as watching *Lupin III*, the one that Miyazaki did," Jaffe continues. "How could we make a game that puts you in that same kind of feeling of high adventure?" The spirit of this project seemed to make it into the final game, even if the original pitch never really got off the ground. Indeed, there was always a clear front-runner for some of the team, it would appear, and Jaffe confirms as much. "Those were competing for the longest time but then I think it was ultimately Ken Feldman, who was the art director on all of them, who said that out of all of the ideas, it was the *God Of War* universe that we'd best be able to realise in a really spectacular way. That was when we finally said 'Fuck it, let's go with this one'."

Hell, it wasn't even *God Of War* back then. "After *Twisted Metal Black* shipped, we spent probably four or five months iterating about four ideas – talking to the team, seeing what they would be into, fleshing out some of the concepts to see which one had the greatest potential. From that, ultimately *Dark Odyssey* – which became *God Of War* – won out, kicking off with the high concept of 'What if Paul Verhoeven had directed *Clash Of The Titans*?' but we changed that to 'What if Ridley Scott had directed *Clash Of The Titans*?' for the second document because nobody knew who Paul Verhoeven was."

» [PS2] Unique combat moves while hanging and climbing made Kratos feel all-powerful. There's no situation in which you're left without a way in which to ruin someone's day.

DELETED SCENES

David Jaffe on the sequences that didn't quite make the cut

THE LIFT

"We built a wonderful level which you can see on some of the behind-the-scenes materials – an elevator through the desert level. With that elevator level, we couldn't figure out how to get the sand to trap the elevator, so we had to table that."

THE WINGS

"We had the Icarus wings in the first game too and even though I think they look beautiful in the third game, I liked the way we were talking about using them in our game. It was more of a Joust mechanic, more about full three-dimensional exploring, combat and flying and less about that kind of tunnel where you're just dodging obstacles. But that's one fucking beautiful tunnel in *God Of War III*."

THE LABYRINTH

"Tobin designed a level that I ended up ripping off for *Twisted Metal* [2012]. It was a maze that started with Kratos in this big open environment, with the walls coming up and down in real-time and changing the level layout. So it was about being in this space that was constantly changing and having to adjust. So we ended up using that for the arena level in *Twisted Metal* on PS3, but I regret that not going because that was such a cool idea."

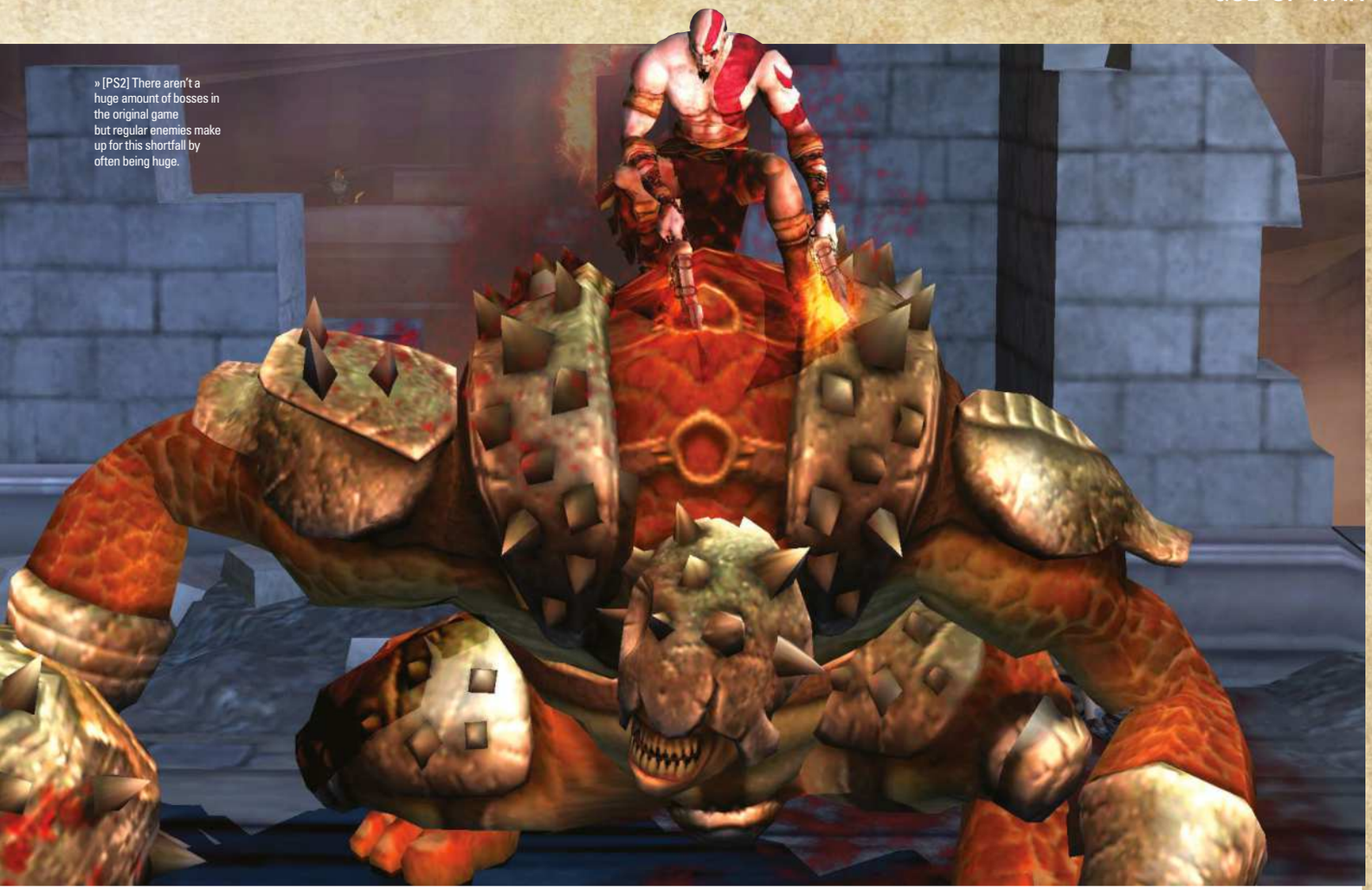
» [PS2] Sony Santa Monica got more out of the PS2 than pretty much any of its peers. .

Lack of cinema knowledge on the production team's end aside, it seems as though Jaffe and his team had prepared concepts for *God Of War* that differed radically from that original seed. "I still have a document showing the very adult, edgy and violent version of what this game could be, which is obviously what it became, but also all the way down to sort of Disney's *Hercules*… maybe we'd do something that was a little more *Mario*," he tells us. "We originally started out with the idea of doing first-person melee, so *God Of War* was originally going to be first-person. It didn't get very far – we talked to some of the programmers about it and did a lot of research. Dreamcast had a game out at the time that was kind of the best in breed for first-person melee, called *Maken X*. We studied that a lot trying to figure out if we could make it work. And *GTA III* had just come out, so we were kicking around the idea of open world. So yeah, it really was a very broad initial conceptual phase while we were looking at this idea and a couple of others, and it just sort of evolved into *God Of War* through a great deal of combat and fighting and yelling at each other."

Even though Jaffe is clearly talking about the design process there, he's done an equally good job of describing the game the team ended up making – loud, brash and with precious few pulled punches. That said, the game's violent streak was all kinds of intentional and for a number of reasons. "As a kid I'd seen and read family-friendly Greek mythology, but I was reading Edith Hamilton to research a lot of this stuff before we went into development and the stories themselves can be easily read to be very gruesome and violent. It was definitely a good fit," explains Jaffe. "It wasn't like we were saying we wanted to do an ultra-violent Lego game – it was more about taking that mythology and playing up the angle that it was really violent, which seems to be something our audience really responds to. It was just having the awareness to spot that match and allow us a better shot at retail."

Hold up a second – did the games industry's resident swear grenade just cough up some retail jargon? Fear not, the decision to make *God Of War* a bloody rampage wasn't entirely written in dollar signs – it was as much a creative decision as it was a commercial one. "I like violent stuff," Jaffe reveals, to the surprise of literally nobody who has ever played a game the man has worked on. "That's why I said Paul Verhoeven in the original pitch – I like that fun, over-the-top, acrobatic violence in movies and games. But I remember being very clear about the fact that we'd have to make sure that this was brutal and intense because if we didn't add

» [PS2] Sony Santa Monica got more out of the PS2 than pretty much any of its peers.



» [PS2] There aren't a huge amount of bosses in the original game but regular enemies make up for this shortfall by often being huge.

WHAT THEY SAID...

God Of War manages to keep the pace slick, the settings beautiful, the action fresh and the body count high

NowGamer, 2005

that layer, it would look like you were just a dude running around in a helmet and a toga."

And perhaps that's why this cultural vein hadn't really been tapped at all during gaming's difficult teenage years – good as the source material may have been, nobody could find that angle to make it exciting and fresh. That takes passion, which Jaffe clearly has in spades. He has a deep-seated love for the subject matter and, as evidenced by the best historical shooters, wartime RTS games and even football management titles, sometimes that's enough of a spark to light up a classic. "Greek mythology has been something that I've loved since I was in like fourth grade," he shares. "*Clash Of The Titans* was an extremely flawed, wonderful movie – when you're ten years old and watching it, it's just, like… wow. That was the summer of '81 when *Clash Of The Titans* came out, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* had come out, and when you look at *God Of War*, there's clearly a great deal of influence from both of those films. It's like superheroes – it's totally ready to go for videogame creation, with all these amazing powers, monsters, abilities and locations. And very few people had trodden that territory at that time."

"I was heavily influenced – and I'm sure I'm not alone – by Ray Harryhausen and his work"

David Jaffe

Since nobody had done a proper mythological adventure in quite some time, it stands to reason that another would be announced while Sony Santa Monica's baby was still in the womb. "I remember once, we were waist-deep in development of *God Of War* and we saw a story online about a game… what the fuck was that game called? It came and it went and it got horrible reviews but to see it and to see their concept art and to read their PR, we just thought we were gonna be so fucking dead," recalls Jaffe. "They beat us to the punch, those sons of bitches!" Fortunately for Sony, this is the games industry, and not every title has the heavyweight credentials or the vision to turn a great concept into a great game, and Jaffe tells us about the moment the competition stopped… well, competing. "We saw it at E3 and breathed a sigh of relief – it wasn't all that great, not to be disrespectful to the people who made it but clearly they were hampered by budget issues."

Whether he's talking about *Rygar* or *Shadow Of Rome* or any number of the nine million other PS2 games we've forgotten is kind of irrelevant – it's a classic scenario that we see to this day (albeit to a lesser extent, now that budgets on triple-A games have gone daft) where lesser publishers and developers will sniff out popular themes for upcoming hits and try to outrun them. We can count on one hand the number of times it has really worked out, so maybe the budget hike has actually helped out in that regard. But even so, how was it that *God Of War* stumbled upon this content goldmine that every other game just strolled past on the way to work each day?

"I guess it has to do with influences, right?," reasons Jaffe. "I was heavily influenced – and I'm sure I'm not alone – by Ray Harryhausen and his work. That was always something that appealed to me and something I wanted to play with. It was around the time that we were doing *God Of War* that we were starting to see a shift ▶

» [PS2] It's surprisingly hard to take a screenshot of God Of War where something isn't bleeding to death….

towards budgets going up pretty significantly. There was that time too when PSone was still out towards the beginning of PS2 and development was still inexpensive enough that you would see all these different games, things like *Second Sight* and *Psi-Ops* – there was this game on PSone, *Tale Of The Sun* or something, about a fucking caveman! – which are the kinds of subjects that are now more the world of indies, because they're affordable and you can take those kinds of chances. We came at the end of that, when most games had started having to play safe, whether it was military shooters or, at the time, crime sims like *GTA*. But Sony being Sony was always so great about letting their developers explore things that aren't just marketing-sanctioned safe genres and we were still allowed to play in those waters."

> **"I want our games to stand up ten years later"**
> David Jaffe

Today's market, of course, is somewhat different. Big name studios and publishers have shut up shop and others have tightened purse-strings, while unrealistic goals have seen successful games be judged otherwise. "I think it'd be really hard and expensive to compete today purely on spectacle," Jaffe nods. "But what's cool is that there are elements of *God Of War* that have nothing to do with the spectacle – level design, story, characters – that you can do with two or three people with a copy of *Unity* or *Game Maker Pro*. That's phenomenal and in that way, the market is wonderful today. But I think if you're talking about building a game where the total reason for it to exist is spectacular setpieces… it's still doable for sure but you have to have a *lot* of fucking money. That was the reason I went away after that game and moved onto more mechanics-based titles. You're only as good as your tech on that day. I want our games to stand up even after the visuals aren't as hot as they once were, where the core mechanics are something you could come back to ten years later and say 'Okay, it's really rough but fuck, it's still really fun'. I don't think I've achieved that yet but working with that game showed me that for me, that was sort of the North Star to follow. If you just chase the spectacle, the applause you get for it is pretty fucking cheap."

Spectacle must have been fairly high on the agenda in creating *God Of War*, mind. But were there any examples of tech not being able to match concept? "The game was so scripted that there wasn't a lot," Jaffe muses. "When we asked for something and they said they couldn't do it, usually that was coming from production rather than tech." One issue, though, would have given Digital Foundry a collective heart attack. "There was the giant crusher at the bottom of Pandora's temple and [the guys] just kept throwing enemies in until it dropped to like 12fps. But we all thought it was fucking awesome – we didn't care that it was 12fps 'cause the idea was so cool and it still worked. But then Tim came over and you'd have thought that his head was about to explode. We fought about frame rate. I care about frame rate only when it hampers the game. So we fought about that, but there was one fight I did lose. I just couldn't convince Tim and Mike and even to this day I'm like 'What the fuck?' – I think he must have made a deal with the devil saying 'I will make you a great programmer but you must never use

WHAT THEY SAID...

Difficult to resist the urge to simply genuflect and be humbled to be in the presence of such digital divinity

Game Informer, Issue 145 May 2005

>> A GAMING EVOLUTION Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver > God Of War> Bayonetta

Raziel's starring role was a game about spectacle and a journey, two areas on which Jaffe and his team spent a lot of time.

Witches, angels, swearing and a bit of the old ultra-violence... Platinum's hardcore action game takes it to the next level.

translucency in any game' or something. I kept saying that we had to have the environment go semi-transparent or we'd have to pull the camera too far back, and we wanted to keep the camera close so it was more dramatic. Almost every other game out there was making the characters and/or the environment go semi-transparent, but you'd have thought I was asking him to go assassinate his parents or something. It was not going to be done on his motherfucking watch. It was fucking bad and even to this day, you can tell I'm still a little annoyed by it, because we could have had some amazing cinematic moments in that game if it weren't for the fact that the goddamn engine didn't support translucency."

For all that it may seem like *God Of War* might today be a case of style over substance – especially with so many unlikely usurpers in the likes of *Revengeance*, *Bayonetta* and *DmC* strutting their hardcore action stuff – that absolutely wasn't the case with the original. Jaffe reflects on meetings of minds where gameplay had to come first. "The guys at Santa Monica are some of the best of the best when it comes to programming. And whenever I asked for something or heard a great idea from the team, most of the time a month later it was in the game. They were a pretty impressive group to work with." Have the special effects guys kill the rainbows and the twinkly music, though – this is Jaffe we're talking to, not Bono. "But they were a pain in the ass to work with, and I'm sure they'd say the same about me," he admits. "Tim and I really didn't get

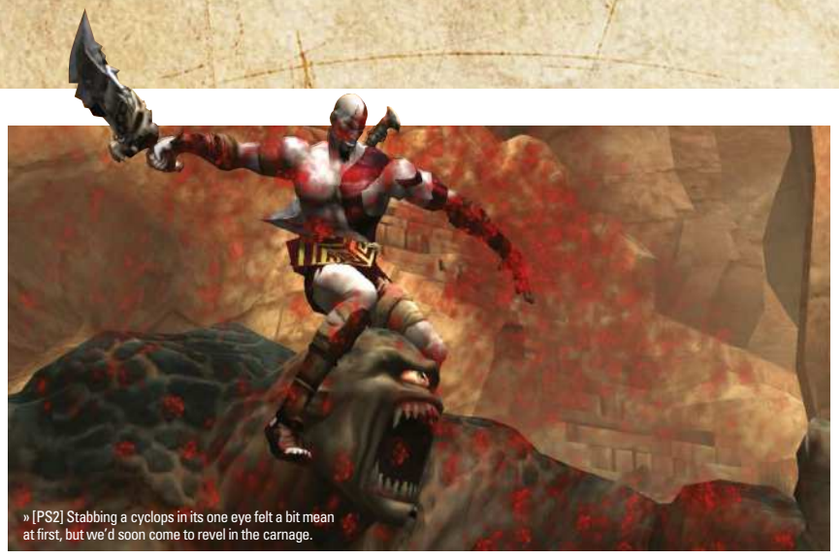
» [PS2] Sure, Kratos can use different weapons, but the Blades Of Chaos are always most satisfying.

» [PS2] As much as we dig God Of War's concept art, we'd love to see the Disney-style mock-ups that Jaffe mentions.

along very well. Me being American and him being British, him being a programmer and me being more of a high-level designer… just one against the other, even just culturally, that can sometimes be enough to break the camel's back. But when you've got cultural *and* discipline differences and you put those people on a project for three years together? I'd work with Tim again, I don't know if he'd work with me but I respect him greatly as a programmer. We got along fine outside of it. But as colleagues, I fucking wanted to blow his head off every single day and I think he probably wanted to do the same thing to me."

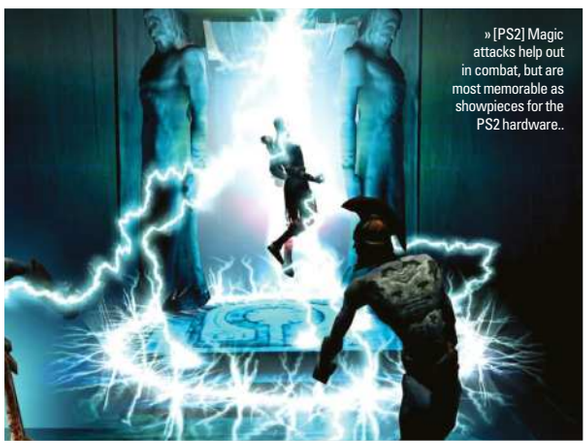
Internal struggles aside, it all looked rosy just as soon as the Hydra demo hit and people got to experience the game themselves. But even with that buzz going around, there was still enough apprehension to make the team second-guess themselves at every turn, as Jaffe vividly recalls. "I remember being at the office with Todd Papy, looking up at this giant poster of Kratos that we'd had made for E3 – it still hangs in the Sony Santa Monica office, actually – and thinking 'This is going to be fucking *huge*'. But within a week, I was in Gamestop and saw the *God Of War* 'coming soon' box and it was stuck way up high on the shelf out of the way. Nothing had changed – if anything, the game had only gotten better as we got closer to completion – but I remember thinking it was going to fucking tank and be a disaster."

But, as it happens, *God Of War* was quite a good videogame (hence this celebration) and such a success for Sony that it's now easily one of the leading PlayStation brands. But there wasn't always such confidence, even internally. "On the day of release, a friend of mine texted me to say there was a line out the door at the game store," Jaffe tells us. "I thought he was full of shit but there totally was this line out the door. We had days when we thought we were onto something and days where we sat around figuring out what our next careers were going to be 'cause we were clearly no good at this."



» [PS2] Stabbing a cyclops in its one eye felt a bit mean at first, but we'd soon come to revel in the carnage.

» [PS2] We daren't think how many times we beat that original Hydra demo. It was lots, though..



» [PS2] Magic attacks help out in combat, but are most memorable as showpieces for the PS2 hardware..

ON LETTING GO

Creating an icon for a company you don't belong to can't exactly be easy, but David Jaffe is surprisingly upfront about how he managed to avoid forging bonds with Kratos as a character. "I feel an attachment to the first and second games," he tells us. "The others are titles that I have great respect for – friends of mine have worked on them, some that I hold in incredibly high regard. I love to see them succeed, and as a company as well given the investment. But I don't feel an attachment. I feel a connection to the first two titles but post-*God Of War II*, I've had zero regrets. I've watched them and cheered them on from the sidelines but I don't feel like it's my character out there or anything like that."

» [PS2] Combining area attacks and more powerful linear strikes makes for a versatile move set – one where mashing is fine but there's depth as well.

WHAT THEY SAID...

It's set in Greece with the mighty Kratos... and we loved every minute of it

Play, issue 129
May 2005

Some critics would argue that there's a case to be made for the latter, especially in light of some of the game's end-game sequences. "Well, Tobin did the spikes," smiles Jaffe as his new studio explodes with enough laughter to level a small village. The accused interjects. "You were just supposed to get knocked down the spikes a little bit, just so you wouldn't get stuck on them," explains level designer Tobin A. Russell. "You weren't supposed to get knocked off entirely." The problem, it seems, was born of over-confidence. "The coders promised they were going to deal with the collision on that," Jaffe confesses. "But what happened was we had focus-tested the shit out of that game and it's a linear process so by the time we got to focus-testing Hades – which is where that area is, at the end of the level – we were just like 'Nah, we got it, we're good'. It was literally the last level of the game so we didn't focus test that one, and that was the one that bit us in the ass. I regret that section, because it really was a shelf moment for a number of gamers."

Issues aside, it's fair to say that *God Of War* carved out a template for a generation of would-be mascots to follow. But, as it turns out, some of the biggest names in the business can't tell you when they're onto something. "It was all just a big fucking blur," Jaffe admits. "There were a lot of nights where we were there until three in the morning and those nights blend into the other nights. There are people that you meet that you'd want to work with for the rest of your career, then there are people that I have wonderful memories of but won't speak to today. I can't fucking stand some of them today and some of them I think are just amazing. There are all these little moments that sort of add up to give you a recollection of an experience that, in my mind, was extremely hard but extremely fulfilling and extremely worthwhile. We made something that we're really proud of." ✱

"[Hades] was the last level of the game, so we didn't focus test that one, and it bit us in the ass"

David Jaffe

» [PS2] Do it, give that guy a really nasty rope burn. The demigod's violent streak can never be sated.

KRATOS

Since making his debut in God Of War, Kratos has showcased the best Sony has to offer through his spectacular epic battles

ICON PROFILE

- **NAME:** KRATOS
- **FIRST APPEARANCE:** GOD OF WAR
- **LAST SEEN IN:** GOD OF WAR (2018)
- **FINEST HOUR:** GOD OF WAR (2018)
- **NOTABLE FOR:** BEING ANGRY

Kratos' many violent encounters with the gods of Greek mythos are all traced back to his history as a Spartan warrior. About to lose in battle, Kratos calls on the Greek god Ares, pledging himself to his service in return for victory, which Ares grants, binding Kratos with his trademark weapon, the Blades of Chaos, at the same time. Kratos' relationship with Ares turns sour when he is tricked into murdering his own family and has their ashes bonded to his skin to give him his famous pale complexion and earn him the nickname, the 'Ghost of Sparta'. His quest for revenge against Ares is where we pick up our journey with Kratos in the 2005 PS2 title *God Of War* as he rampages through the realms of men and gods, eventually killing Ares and taking his place as the new God of War.

A combo system built on racking up ridiculously high numbers, epic boss fights against literal gods, and a penchant for ostentatiously violent QTE finishers combined to make the game a hit, ensuring Kratos' story would be continued.

So it was in 2007 with *God Of War II*. At the beginning of the game, Kratos loses his godhood and is killed by Zeus. On his way to the Underworld, Kratos is saved by the Titan Gaia, who sets him on a quest to find a way to travel back in time to the moment of Zeus' betrayal. Thus begins another quest of revenge for a notoriously angry man, during which we get to fight a host of mythological figures, including Theseus, Icarus and the Kraken, as the series doubled down on its jaw-droppingly spectacular boss battles. This game didn't take major steps forward in terms of its mechanics, but it did iron out the creases, making for a near flawless action experience.

> "Kratos has found a new lease of life in the PS4 era"

At the end of *God Of War II*, Kratos pledges to end the reign of the gods of Mount Olympus and that's where we pick up when *God Of War III* was released for the PS3 in 2010 as Kratos joins the Titans on a climb up the mountain of the gods. Taking advantage of the additional power of the PS3, this entry upped the scale of the exciting action combat the series was known for, blowing us away with stunning scenes as we battled against the likes of Poseidon, Hades and even Zeus himself. After defeating Zeus and seemingly ending the era of the Olympian Gods, Kratos, a character defined by his anger and violence, finally forgives himself for his past sins, sacrificing himself to give humanity hope.

Outside of these mainline titles, Kratos has starred in a number of spin-offs that fill in gaps in the character's story. 2008 PSP title *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* is a prequel to the original game, and 2010's *God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta*, which also released on the PSP, tells the story of Kratos' attempt to find his missing brother, Deimos, after becoming the God of War. *God Of War: Ascension*, released on the PS3 in 2013, again goes back in the *God Of War* timeline to the moment when Kratos renounced his oath to Ares, tasking you with escaping from and defeating the three Furies who have imprisoned and tortured Kratos at Ares' behest.

Kratos has found a new lease of life in the PS4 era with his latest *God Of War* reboot. Kratos' rage-filled persona was a lot of fun to inhabit, but he was a bit one-note. That, along with the fact that he'd already slaughtered almost every god and creature in Greek mythology, led developers Sony Santa Monica to give us a new version of Kratos in a brand new setting. Set in a world of Norse gods, Kratos is now a father who has taken steps to control his rage for the benefit of his son, Atreus. Kratos and his son set out on a journey to scatter the ashes of Kratos' wife and Atreus' mother, whose last wish was to have her ashes scattered from the highest peak of the nine realms. This new setup has given Kratos – now sporting a big hipster beard and a hefty axe instead of his trademark Blades of Chaos – the opportunity to show more range as a character and further endear himself to fans. Of course, it's also offered up an excuse for some more epic god-based battles from a new mythological pantheon.

The game's bold re-imagining of Kratos is accompanied by an overhaul of the series' core mechanics, including a new over-the-shoulder camera and RPG-lite systems. It's been a roaring success. A character who looked like he might have been running out of places to go has been reinvigorated. It seems that his status as PlayStation standard bearer isn't over just yet. *

> MAGIC MOMENTS

■ Kratos defeating a god as a mortal and taking his place as God of War is a defining moment.

■ Seeing Kratos team up with his son changed the game and gave us a new perspective on him.

■ Kratos' appearance in *Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny* was his first crossover.

■ *God Of War 3* asks you to hammer Circle to pummel Zeus into submission.

VIKING BEARD
Kratos' appearance has changed significantly since the end of *God Of War 3*. He's looking slightly older, and is now rocking a big bushy Viking beard and some sparse leather armour.

SKIN
Kratos' trademark white complexion earned him the nickname 'Ghost of Sparta'. He gained it after being tricked into killing his family by Ares. He was cursed for his act, their ashes bonded to his skin to forever remind him of what he had done.

TATTOOS
Kratos' brother, Deimos, was taken as a boy by the former God of War, Ares. The pair were later reunited in *God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta*, before Deimos was killed by Thanatos, the God of Death. Kratos' red tattoos are intended to honour his brother, mimicking his birth marks.

ABDOMEN
Kratos' abdomen has taken a bit of a battering over the years. That scar is a result of first being impaled by Zeus with the Blade of Olympus, and later impaling himself in the same area at the end of *God Of War 3*.

BLADES OF CHAOS
Even if the beard didn't give away the identity of Kratos, his impressive weapons would. This pair of chained blades were fashioned by Ares, the God of War, and were first used by Kratos in the original game.

■ Opening Pandora's Box and growing to god-like size is one of Kratos' many epic moments.

■ The opening to *God Of War 3* is one of the most stunning in any PS3 game.

■ In 2018's *God Of War*, there is a fantastic moment that calls back to the original games.

■ When you first hop realms in 2018's *God Of War*, you realise the true scale and beauty of the game.

10 GOD OF WAR BOSSES

10

ALRIK THE BARBARIAN KING

God Of War 2 - It was Kratos' encounter with the Barbarian King, in which he was set to suffer his first defeat in battle, that kick-started his whole story, giving him the motivation to pledge his service to Ares in return for victory. That's why its a cool moment when the Barbarian King returns to get revenge on Kratos in *God Of War 2*.

9

HRAEZYLR

God Of War (2018) Given that the series is known for its epic boss fights, getting to take on a dragon is exactly the kind of thing we wanted from the *God Of War* reboot. Kratos starts the fight by slashing at the dragon's tongue from inside his mouth, then takes it to the ground, before ending up tearing a huge chunk out of its neck.

8

DAUÐI KAUPMAÐR

God of War (2018) Our first boss encounter in the new *God Of War*, this boss is a look at what the game has in store – he's the first of many boss trolls you will have to take out throughout the game, and an early opportunity to play with the game's new take on combat.

7

HYDRA

God Of War Not only was it a stunning opening to kick off *God Of War*, the boss battle against the Hydra set the template for everything that was to come. It's a truly epic fight against a cool legendary creature that ends with the kind of characteristically brutal QTE execution that would become a hallmark of the *God Of War* series.

6

ZEUS

God Of War 3 The final fight against Zeus in *God Of War 3* is partly made by the huge build-up to it throughout the series' story, including Kratos' murder by Zeus and his ascent from the depths of Hades. The fight includes multiple phases, is punctuated by Kratos taking out the Titan Gaia, and ends with a brutal pummelling that gives you cause to reflect on Kratos' violent nature and your own embrace of it.

5

COLOSSUS OF RHODES

God Of War 2 In a stunning sequence from *God Of War 2*, Zeus animates the Colossus of Rhodes in an attempt to kill Kratos. The boss fight is essentially a whole level that sees you battle your way through the city, fighting standard enemies, avoiding the boss's attacks and chipping away at it piece by piece. Eventually, Kratos drains his godly power into the Sword of Olympus, cuts his way inside the Colossus and destroys it from inside.

THAT DEFINED THE SERIES

4

HADES

■ **God Of War 3** No one escapes from the Underworld. No one except for Kratos, that is. In *God Of War 3*, his quest for vengeance requires him to return from the Underworld, which means defeating its master, Hades. It's a fantastic fight with multiple stages that ends with you taking Hades' own weapon, the Claws of Hades, to use for the rest of the game.

3

BALDUR

■ **God Of War (2018)** While we traditionally associate the epic nature of *God Of War*'s boss fights with the scale of the enemies Kratos takes on, this boss is a great example of how the series can stun us with brutal battles against foes the same size as Kratos. The thrilling series of encounters with Baldur are the best that the rebooted *God Of War* has to offer.

2

POSEIDON

■ **God Of War 3** Part of a stunning opening sequence in *God Of War 3*, this fight happens as you climb Mount Olympus. It begins with you battling a gigantic watery sea horse on the body of the Titan Gaia, with Gaia aiding you in the battle. It ends with Kratos unleashing his rage on the battered god and gouging his fingers into his eyes. Eww.

1

CRONOS

■ **God Of War 3** We've talked about Kratos' many epic encounters, but none are more epic than this classic fight from *God Of War 3*. The battle takes place on Cronos himself, whose size dwarfs the comparatively ant-like Kratos. You tear off his fingernails, battle enemies across his body, get swallowed, cut up his insides, send a huge spike through the poor Titan's jaw and then stab him in the head with the Blade of Olympus.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

INFO

» **Year:** 2009
» **Developer:** Eidos/Warner Bros.
» **Key People:** Stefon Hill – Director; Paul Dini – Writer; Kevin Conroy, Mark Hamill and Arleen Sorkin – Actors

GO DEEPER

» **Batman's and the Joker's appearances were inspired by existing iterations, from *Batman* artists Jim Lee and Brian Bolland respectively.**

» **According to Ian Livingstone, there was one member of the dev team who worked on nothing but Batman's cape – *for two years.***

» As a visual flourish, Batman's suit takes permanent rips and tears throughout the game.

Rocksteady's blockbuster game set the standard for adapting superheroes from comic books to controllers. Drew Sleep activates Detective Mode to show you why

THE BACKGROUND

In the early-to-mid Noughties, superheroes were existing under the dustsheets in the world of videogames, despite beginning to enjoy success on the silver screen. They were enjoying a fraction of a spotlight with *Marvel Vs Capcom*, sure, but there was no real definitive title that let cowls, capes or spandex take the centre stage.

Spotting this gap, Eidos obtained the rights to a *Batman* title in spring 2007, and, with its publishing partner Warner Bros., placed its trust in a little-known studio called Rocksteady – a studio with only the lukewarm *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* to its name. The company had made a compelling prototype for Eidos, and was set to work on the Batman title by September of that year.

Rocksteady brought *Batman* comic book and *Animated Series* alumni into the fold in order to create a game that set itself apart from the film series that was ongoing at the time, opting for twisted visuals and outlandish enemies that would fit better under the guise of a videogame.

As the release period of August 2009 drew near, Eidos president Ian Livingstone placed himself as the chief engineer of the hype train. He openly told the gaming press at the time that Eidos was expecting *Arkham Asylum* to score "over 90", he was confident that the team had made something fantastic – and like some sort of opposite reincarnation of Nostradamus, he couldn't have been more on the money.

THE GAME

Contrary to the zeitgeist, *Arkham Asylum* isn't entirely original, it instead cherry-picks tropes and systems from other games and weaves them together. Its iconic opening, where you enter the asylum, riffs on *Half-Life*'s opening tour through Black Mesa; its item-gated structure, where you have to obtain power-ups to unlock areas,

» What better villain to kickstart a *Batman* gaming series than the dastardly criminal clown himself?

is ripped straight from *Metroid*; and its story and characters… well, they need no introduction.

That's not to say *Asylum* doesn't have a patent to its name, however. Its Freeflow combat system is one of the best, and beautifully elegant, combat systems to ever grace a controller. In this system you must correctly time hits, stuns, counters and evades (each action mapped to a face button on your controller), and, as you encounter strong enemies, you must remember their strengths and exploit their weaknesses – some enemies may require stunning before hitting them, for example. The resulting combat is so tightly made it became the standard for the series and has been 'borrowed' by many other games to this day.

What makes *Arkham Asylum* so good, and important, though, is how perfectly it puts you into the shoes, cape and cowl of the Batman himself. Every aspect of Batman is covered: stealth sections using fear against your enemies? Done. Fighting hordes of enemies in a seemingly-effortless fashion? Got it. Memorable encounters with some of the most dastardly villains ever conceived? Sorted. *Arkham Asylum* is a piece of the Batman franchise that has been constructed with a loving care for its source material, making it stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other great works from the series, such as *The Killing Joke* and *The Dark Knight*.

Sitting down and starting the game is like the beginning of an addiction. After the introduction sequence, and subsequent scuffle as Joker assumes control of the asylum, you'll want to unearth every secret Arkham has to offer, unravel every riddle that the Riddler has left for you in a challenge of wits, and, of course, stop the Prince Of Crime dead in his tracks.

There are bugbears along the way, of course, as the enemies become stronger you require a lengthy list of specific instructions on how to vanquish each enemy you encounter; the game's infamous Killer Croc encounter is also a bone of contention with many who play the game, causing frustration as you are forced to *walk* through the sewer area to avoid becoming a main course. The game also suffers from a common videogame problem: not being able to deliver on the climax it builds up to. Without giving much away: the final boss encounter is nothing short of a joke. Normally, these blips could blemish a game into mediocrity however the rest of *Asylum* is so polished that they can be excused. Rocksteady did take notes, however, and fixed a lot of *Asylum*'s issues for its sequel, *Arkham City*.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Arkham Asylum not only set the bar for superhero games, it set the bar for action-adventure games for years to follow, and its influence is still being felt today. Its easy-to-pick-up, difficult-to-master combat can be seen, ripped wholesale, in modern releases from *Mad Max* to *Shadow Of Mordor*. *Asylum*'s sequels, *City*, *Knight*, and, to a lesser extent, *Origins* have all enjoyed critical and commercial success, however they didn't stay too far from the original game's Metroidvania-like template, and with good reason: it works, and the people clearly enjoy it. It's frequently debated if *Arkham Asylum* or *Arkham City* is the better game of the series, however without *Asylum*, the franchise will have never existed, which is grounds enough for us to crown it as the jewel of the series, thus cementing its rightful position in the gaming annals as a rock-solid classic. ✱

» A vain Batman here, favouring striking a stupid pose, rather than clobbering an attacking mutant criminal.

Things of note

METROID-WHAT!?

The game uses a Metroidvania template where certain areas of the overworld are inaccessible until you obtained a power-up to traverse the area.

BIFF! POW! SMASH!

The game's combat system requires you to time hits, counters and stuns in a incredibly simple, yet nuanced approach to combat that has been mimicked frequently

BAT-SHIT CRAZY

The Scarecrow scenes are fantastic. His toxin sends Bats into a nightmare drug trip, with the bag-headed villan himself showing up with an entourage of skeletons.

AUTHENTICITY

The team wanted to make its game faithful, so veteran Batman writer Paul Dini was brought on board and long-time *Batman Animated Series* voice actors were hired.

BECOMING THE BAT

Above all, *Arkham Asylum* nailed what it feels like to be Batman. The characters, story, gadgets, combat and detective work puts you, the gamer, in his iconic suit.

» Scarecrow's Fear Toxin set-pieces were utilised as a great excuse for the team to flex their creative muscles.

» Kevin Conroy's then-17-year experience of voicing Batman certainly shows in his fantastic performance.

MAKING THE PERFECT SEQUEL

Over ten years after the game's release, developers Bruce Straley, Robh Ruppel, and Jonathan Stein reflect on the making of Uncharted 2

At the end of *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, Nathan Drake is returning home a hero. He's defeated the bad guy, won back the affections of his true love, Elena, and even uncovered the lost kingdom of Shambhala… albeit not long before triggering its collapse into permanent ruin (hey, nobody's perfect).

"So, where do we go from here?" asks Elena, one arm tenderly looped through Drake's as the enamoured pair watch the sun dip behind the snow-capped crests of the Himalayas. "I don't know," replies our protagonist, coyly, "I haven't thought that far ahead."

It's the epitomical scene for this PlayStation icon; the charismatic, ever optimistic improv artist who – let's face it – is basically that one friend in every Whatsapp group who never responds to messages unless it's to apologise for forgetting your birthday. More than that, though, Drake's comments are a fitting reflection of developer Naughty Dog's own piecemeal approach to making consistently high calibre games, as explained by *Uncharted 2*'s director, Bruce Straley.

"Everything we do is on a one-at-a-time basis at Naughty Dog," reveals Straley. "We've never considered any project as part of a franchise production, and that's mainly because we can't think that far ahead. We therefore tried to make *Uncharted 2* a sequel that you could pick up cold without having played *Drake's Fortune*, easily accessing the characters, the world, and the story without knowing anything about Drake's history." ▶

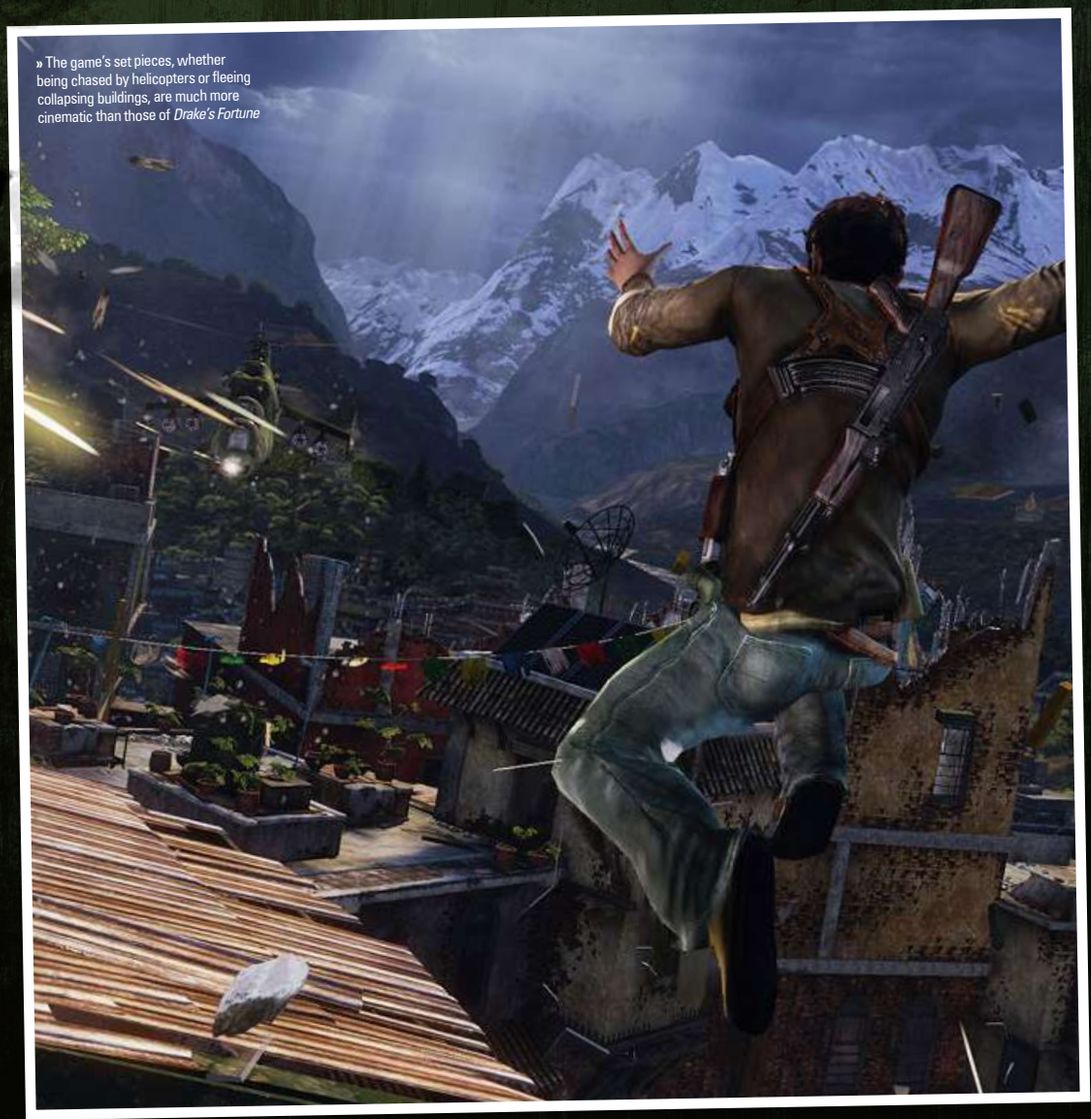
IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **» DEVELOPER:** NAUGHTY DOG
- **» RELEASED:** 2009
- **» PLATFORM:** PS3

» The search for Shambhala takes Drake and co from Istanbul to Nepal, and into the Tibetan Himalayas

> **"I had been playing a lot of games with my daughter before I joined the studio"**
> Bruce Straley

Straley had previously worked on 2007's *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* as co-art director, but – after development on that game had seen director Amy Hennig overburdened with sole leadership of the project – a frank conversation with Naughty Dog's co-president Evan Wells saw him promoted to head up production on the sequel alongside Hennig as development partners. In preparation, the pair (along with Neil Druckmann and Josh Scherr, who made up the rest of the project's core writing team), attended one of author Robert McKee's famous storytelling seminars in downtown Los Angeles and – according to Straley – it was here where the seeds of *Uncharted 2* were really born.



» The game's set pieces, whether being chased by helicopters or fleeing collapsing buildings, are much more cinematic than those of *Drake's Fortune*

"I vividly remember having a clear 'eureka!' moment, and all of us engaging in these really rich discussions during the seminar breaks about the hero's three arc structure, and this idea of the gap between expectation and results. You set up an expectation for the protagonist, and something obstructs the way there and forces them to overcome that obstacle. That's storytelling 101, but we also realised then and there, that's game design too. So to tether those story beats to the gameplay in a more meaningful way was the foundation that got this team of four people to really look at *Uncharted 2* as a holistic experience."

In light of this newfound epiphany, Naughty Dog looked to the film industry for *Uncharted 2*'s pre-production recruitment drive, in the hopes of furnishing that cinematic flair it was aiming for. Hollywood was just up the road from its sunny Santa Monica HQ, after all, and Robh Ruppel was thus brought on as the game's lead art director, having previously worked in visual development on a number of big screen Disney animations.

"I had been playing a lot of games with my daughter before I joined the studio," Ruppel tells me, "and coincidentally a bunch of those games had been Naughty Dog titles, so to be part of that team for their next big endeavour was a hugely exciting prospect." As lead art director, Ruppel was responsible for taking Hennig and Straley's new, cineliterate vision, and turning it into a consistent visual language. "All the locations had to have a certain reality to them. That's something that Bruce was really emphatic about. He had this great phrase, 'keep everything core', meaning he didn't want it to be too concept heavy or imaginary, so whatever we did we had to research heavily."

In order to create the lost city of Shambhala, for example, Ruppel's team pored over the annals of Mesopotamian history and ancient architecture to conjure a completely imagined place that nevertheless managed to look just as much a work of reality as one of fantasy. "Trying to come up with a unique location that's never been seen before, but also feels like it fits within our world and has a believable history… it's hard to design something from scratch that has all those elements," he explains. "We eventually combined the two motifs – the pyramid and the ziggurat – to form the basis of our environmental storytelling, to make sure Shambhala felt like it could appear in the pantheon of great monuments of the ancient world."

» Stealth played a bigger role in *Uncharted 2*, with more places to hide and better silent takedowns

Like Ruppel, *Uncharted 2* was also Jonathan Stein's first project working in 'The Kennel' (the playful term of endearment that Naughty Dog employees use to refer to their spacious studio building), but his previous experience at Monolith Productions and Nintendo set him up well for work as a Game Designer on Nathan Drake's sophomore adventure. In conversation, it is clear that Stein looks back on *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* with great fondness, nostalgia, and pride.

"I remember first showing up at the studio and being almost overwhelmed with the excitement amongst the team," says Stein. "There were so many passionate and motivated people, all of whom were eager to think about the game holistically and outside of their disciplines, which is something that's hard to foster at a studio.

"I, for example, was personally thrilled about the prospect of getting to work with the third-person perspective, and the camera work that came with it, as I'd done a lot of first-person games prior to that, which has its limitations when it comes to cinematography."

Stein and the design team were responsible for building spaces and sequences that balanced Uncharted's core mechanics of combat, platforming, and puzzles with ambitious, Hollywood-style set pieces, all while closely following Straley's core design philosophy "to keep the player in control as much as possible."

"It's something I really pushed to put into practice on *Among Thieves*," explains Straley, who admits that he can be a bit of a "bull in a china shop" when it comes to collective decision making in the development pipeline. "If there was something that I didn't like in the design department, then I would go in and express myself quite clearly about that. I could have been nicer, but that's hindsight, I guess!"

Stein himself remembers working with the likes of Straley, Hennig, and Druckmann as a tough but edifying experience, all of whom who he describes as "extremely motivated, intense, driven, but also a lot of fun."

"One great success that I would credit all of them with is creating a strong sense of what we were making, even beyond the usual learnings that you get from working on a sequel," Stein tells me. "Everyone in the studio just had a really good sense of the characters, the tone, and the standard of quality we were aiming for. They all worked hard to make sure everyone was instilled with that so we could make well informed micro-decisions along the way, without necessarily having to consult them for every single design choice."

That philosophy to keep almost everything in *Among Thieves* "on the stick", though, is exactly what elevated *Uncharted 2* above both its predecessors and contemporaries in the genre. 10 years later, Straley can safely say that the game's achievements were worth the uphill battle in winning everyone over to his vision, not to mention vaulting all the extra design hurdles that came with it.

"If there's an emotional beat or piece of exposition that player absolutely needs to hear, then it can be in a cutscene but, aside from those, if you can put the experience on the stick, involving the player in the moment, that is truly using our medium in the best possible way. You're making a game that's telling a story rather than making a story that happens to be in a game."

"You're making a game that's telling a story rather than making a story that happens to be in a game"

Bruce Straley

» Doin the locomotion: traversing a moving train as it speeds through jungle and onto cliffs – while fighting off mercenaries and a helicopter – is just another day at the office for Drake

> **"My main worry was that our audience might actually have a little bit of trouble with the non-linear nature of the narrative"** Bruce Straley

You can't talk about *Uncharted 2* without paying tribute to its very first moments; a hair-raising, 'in media res' opening that sees Drake escaping the debris of a train wreck by the skin of his teeth. The game follows this baptism of fire by jumping back and forth between then and several months earlier to gradually reveal how our hero wound up in such a precarious situation to begin with.

It sets the groundwork for a tautly structured narrative device that makes full use of its cultivated dread; the next time Drake encounters that train, chugging along at full pace through the Nepalese jungle, a lump in the throat forms as you realise what's about to happen, cursed with the knowledge of how it ends for our hero. We owe a lot of credit to Stein for bringing the entire locomotive sequence to life but, according to Straley, the move to begin *Uncharted 2* with Drake at rock bottom came out of a last minute decision late into development, after Druckmann brought the idea to the writing table.

"That wasn't our original opening, actually," Straley reveals. "It was a more of a simple, linear three act structure, which made it a bit of a slog to get into the story. It was Neil, pretty late in production, who came up with the idea to take the middle section of this train wreck and put that at the beginning, and then to intersplice some of the story bits to create this timeline that jumps back and forth. It doesn't matter when a change like that comes into production; if it makes the experience better, then nine times out of ten we go for it."

For Stein, that meant his baby – the level he had been working on for months – was to become the scene which opens the game itself, and the designer recalls the heady mix of exhilaration and stress that came with that unexpected weight of responsibility.

"I remember Neil telling me in a meeting that it was going to be the opening, and there was a real sense of excitement and fear about it. My main worry was that our audience might actually have a little bit of trouble with the non-linear nature of the narrative, but during development there had been an explosion of time travel related TV shows and movies with more sophisticated narratives, so by the time release rolled around people were very comfortable with that kind of unconventional structure, and it just wasn't an issue."

» *Uncharted 2*'s cold opening (in more ways than one) is one of the series' most memorable moments

Designing the train sequence itself, both the opening escape and the unfolding carnage that bookends the second act, was a gargantuan task that demanded a seamless marriage between Naughty Dog's in-house technology, forward-thinking game design, and growing aptitude for operatic storytelling. For the concept artists, the challenge was to visualise a breathtaking tour of natural scenery that nevertheless abided to the parameters of *Uncharted*'s gameplay.

"The creative team had come up with what they wanted to do already. Our job was just to devise a train that looked interesting, along with the mountainside that its set on, making sure that it felt both impressive and scary," explains Ruppel. "You don't realise how much attention we put into things like the ratio of snow versus rock, the type of rock, and so on, but it all feeds into creating a consistent visual language that tells its own story for that sequence."

For Stein, the inspiration for building the level came as much from the toys he used to play with as a kid as it did the concept art that Ruppel's team produced: "When I started at Naughty Dog, one of the first things I did was grab one of the model train cars they had in the office and use that as a guide to make a proxy. From there, I was able to rig up three train cars hanging off the cliff pretty quickly, and then it just became a very long iteration process of setting up a series of vignettes that showed off the climbing mechanics. There's something like 60 custom cameras that trigger one after the other for that sequence, with a lot of attention on framing it in such a way that the action is easy to execute."

"I'm proud of the fact that most people don't realise the whole thing is basically a tutorial level, but it is very much an encyclopedia of Drake's climbing mechanics, presented one after the other. The whole thing has a real sense of threat about it, yet it's extremely difficult to fail that sequence; it's a sheep in wolf's clothing!" ▶

Despite two critically and commercially successful sequels (and a fantastic spin-off in the form of *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy*), *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* is still widely considered the pinnacle of the series to date; a game that came together so perfectly for its time and place that it's practically a cliché. You probably won't be surprised to hear that the people who worked on *Uncharted 2* agree wholeheartedly, describing the creative process as a lightning-in-a-bottle, seat-of-your-pants experience, one in which the stars aligned for a project that, while not without its moments of hardship and tension, came together like pieces of a puzzle falling neatly into place.

"Among Thieves is absolutely my favourite and, for me personally, the best entry in the franchise as a whole, not least because it was such a formative experience for me to work on, and has defined the rest of my career since," admits Straley, who went on to head up development with Druckmann on what would eventually become *The Last of Us*, another groundbreaking Naughty Dog hit. "We could not have made *Uncharted 3* or *4* without *Among Thieves*, and we certainly couldn't have made *The Last of Us* without everything we'd learnt on that game either."

Ruppel, who eventually won a GDC Award for Best Art Direction for his work on Among Thieves, also has nothing but fond memories of the entire experience, and even more praise for the team he feels lucky to have worked alongside. "Bruce was the right guy for the job in perfecting the play experience, Amy was fantastic for guiding the story and the believability of character and dialogue, and Neil was crucial for implementing both of those pillars into the design of the game itself while maintaining a consistency of product," Ruppel tells me. "You can't plan this kind of meeting of minds where everyone's on the same page about the level of ambition and goals for a project, but when it happens, you're so thankful that you were there, because it's such a precious moment for your career or even your lifetime."

Naughty Dog knew it had something special on its hands then, but even Stein admits that – at the time – none of the team really understood just how much of an impact *Uncharted 2* would have upon the gaming landscape following its launch. The game put Nathan Drake on the map as a PlayStation mascot, selling millions, earning near universal acclaim, inspiring a new generation of action games to come (including one of its muses in the form of Square Enix's rebooted *Tomb Raider* series), cementing Naughty Dog's status as a prestige studio alongside the likes of Rockstar and BioWare, and paving the way for a now in-the-works *Uncharted* movie starring *Spider-Man* star Tom Holland in the lead role.

"I'm largely motivated by abject fear that what im working on will not be loved by the end user," jokes Stein, "so you could

» This year's model: Chloe was a popular addition to the cast, earning her own spin-off, *The Lost Legacy*, in 2017

» The intricate puzzles can be a source of fun or frustration – sometimes both – depending on how quick you are to find the solution

» Improvements to the melee system compared to *Drake's Fortune* made hand-to-hand combat much more satisfying

say I wasn't prepared for the sheer volume and extent of the positive feedback we received both immediately after launch, and in the years following. I do think we had some very successful playtests, which often gives you great confidence in the ability to identify and solve a bunch of problems to make a game the best it can be. Even then, though, the way people talk about Among Thieves still shocks me, but in a good way!"

I ask Straley, who left Naughty Dog in 2017 and has been on hiatus from games development ever since, if he'd ever like to see another entry in the *Uncharted* series, purely from his perspective as a fan now that's he is outside of the kennel for good. His answer is at once unsurprising, but also the best reflection yet of how important *Uncharted 2* is as a metric touchstone for the franchise itself.

"I would love to play another Nathan Drake game, but I would want to see it done in a way that is mindful of the original concepts that we pushed for in *Uncharted 2*. That is, keeping everything core, everything on the stick, all the set pieces playable. If I was back there, I would be pushing Uncharted even further into the realm of player choice, and exploring how that affects the adventure. More than that, though, the industry still needs well-drawn characters and good storytelling that doesn't take itself seriously like a lot of games now tend to in the triple-A space."

If Straley's wishes come true, then we may indeed all find ourselves fawning over *Uncharted 5* in another ten years from now. Hell, Drake's daughter, Cassie, might even have her own separate trilogy by then. But all of that is postulation, based only in empty hypotheticals. One thing you can bank on for 2029, though, and of this I am certain, is that people will still be talking about *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*.

Not only did Naughty Dog's seminal epic crack the code to marrying Hollywood's cinematic muscle with gaming's agency of play, it made important strides in showcasing what the medium is capable of, inspiring countless other developers to aim higher, push further, and explore beyond the status quo. Nathan Drake may be an improviser, but the heritage he leaves behind holds a permanence in gaming history that can never be shaken. ✱

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

As masterful as its sequel is, this sun-bleached Western still remains Rockstar's watershed achievement, warts and all

Words by Chris Thursten

The myth of the Old West is a perfect fit for Rockstar. A genre of cinema with game-like themes, a setting that lends itself easily to the open-world treatment, and one that naturally supports the subjects that have become dominant in studio co-founder Dan Houser's writing as it has matured.

The Old West offers a particular vision of masculinity in a time of crisis, and deals in the collision between the individual and society. It is also an opportunity to diagnose the state of life in modern America by exploring the fable of the nation's creation.

These ideas are present in *Grand Theft Auto*, of course, but Rockstar's most successful series is handcuffed to irony. In 2010, making a Western presented the studio with an opportunity to escape this tonal double bind by venturing into the historical and cultural past. The result: Rockstar's warmest and most earnest game. *Red Dead Redemption* is set in 1911 in a compacted slice of the south that

» Marston's quest for amnesty requires him to track down his former gang members and bring them to justice.

» The game's morality system means your actions have discernible consequences in the *Red Dead* world.

"The Old West offers an opportunity to diagnose the state of life in modern America by exploring the fable of the nation's creation"

stretches from the edge of the Great Plains down through Texas – fictionalised here as New Austin – and across the border into northern Mexico.

Modernisation is coming from the east: the first image in the game is of an early automobile being offloaded from a paddle steamer. Protagonist John Marston steps off the boat in a battered cowboy hat and frayed waistcoat, utterly out of place. A few bars into the piano melody that opens the game, a discordant clash of electric guitars cuts across the soundtrack. Bill Elm and Woody Jackson's score is deeply indebted to Ennio Morricone, but this piece, *Exodus In America*, delivers its message masterfully. The Old West is vanishing, but it is not yet gone. America's wild history is fading, but its biggest battles are yet to be fought.

Marston is a former bandit returning to the frontier on the promise of a pardon for himself and his family, his wife and son, although their safety is contingent on Marston capturing or killing

the leaders of his old gang. We are not told this outright: it's something the player learns, piece by piece, as they guide Marston through an opening that is remarkable for its restraint. It takes around an hour for *Red Dead Redemption* to get to the point where it asks you to shoot somebody. That time is spent subtly introducing Marston's two 'lives' – the unrepentant cowboy and the reformed homesteader – and teaching the player the basics of horse riding, travel, and gunplay.

“The game presents opportunities for heroism that aren’t violent, but are rooted in the types of things Marston is good at”

The setting for this tutorial is a ranch run by Bonnie MacFarlane, a young woman who discovers Marston by the side of the road after he is shot by the very men after whom he’s been sent. Bonnie is one of *Red Dead Redemption*’s greatest achievements. As the game works to establish its various moral dualisms – the notions of savagery and civilisation that inform everything from the concept of manifest destiny to the game’s own morality meter – Bonnie questions and deconstructs this system as only an outsider can. In their first few meetings, Marston will not reveal anything of his history or mission.

“You are being deliberately obscure as a substitute for having a personality,” Bonnie chides him, fondly slicing through not only Marston, but also the Western itself. The Western is about heroes, usually men, who enter the picture from one side and leave on the other. Its defining images are the ride into the sunset and the middle-distance stare. It is about unknowable people, and this presents challenges when transferred to a medium where the viewer is in control of the lead character at all times. It’s difficult to have John Marston leave the picture when he is the camera’s only focus.

His early relationship with Bonnie provides Rockstar with a deft solution to this problem. The player acts as a third party in a romantic scenario that is not, in effect, a romance. Marston is married, and so Bonnie’s growing interest is impossible to reciprocate. For the player at this point, however, Abigail Marston is an unknown quantity – it’s Bonnie’s perspective that we adopt as we learn about John, and it’s John’s relationship with Bonnie that is defined by the player in those early missions.

The game presents opportunities for heroism that aren’t violent, but are rooted in the types of things Marston is good at. In one

» Competitive online multiplayer pits you against up to 15 other players in various challenges.

» Players can form posses with fellow gamers to explore the *Red Dead* world co-operatively.

» Marston is considered to be one of the best and most complex characters in gaming, and his voice actor (Rob Wiethoff) recieved considerable praise for his performance.

early mission, he chases down and breaks a wild stallion that bolts from its pack. Later, the player is asked to ride ahead of a herd of stampeding cows during a thunderstorm. The stakes here are not immediately deadly for either Bonnie or her ranchers, but the loss of the herd would nonetheless doom the ranch. The mission demonstrates the fragile balance of life in the West while framing Marston as a solution to that fragility, rather than part of the problem.

Crucially, it also gives the player freedom to determine the extent of Marston's heroism. Like the horse riding, which is unintuitive at first but reveals finesse with time, herding these cattle is not a binary proposition. It's possible for you to lose a substantial amount of the herd without failing the mission, and Bonnie's reaction is the way the game subsequently rewards or punishes the player for their effort.

Even as Marston's eyes are looking elsewhere, the player's are locked squarely on this place and this relationship. What soon becomes evident is that the MacFarlane ranch has a Marston-shaped hole in it. When Marston leaves Bonnie for the last time near the end of the game, he is riding off to meet a tragedy that is grounded in his dual nature. Through Bonnie – and the future that she wants for him, but that it is impossible for him to have – the game intimates an inaccessible third option.

Redemption binds him to a destiny that is always just out of shot, and it's this that makes him a Western hero rather than a shooter protagonist with a cowboy hat on. An implicit suggestion here is that the player is focusing on Marston's story, but this isn't necessarily the case; this is an open-world game, and other options are available. The game's toolset allows Marston

» The developers used a stunt horse to capture and recreate realistic movement.

▶ to run off and wear a top hat, to hogtie villagers and leave them on railway tracks, to hunt coyotes in perpetuity. Played like this, the game is perhaps most notable for its scenery and its audio design. There's the sweeping expanse of the Great Plains, the sun rising over mesas in the far South, the sting of vibrato guitar and the sound of the wind in the long grass. It's still a great game in these circumstances, but its greatest moments occur when these strengths are used to support a directed narrative.

In one sequence, Marston rides to Mexico for the first time as José González' *Far Away* plays for the only time. The section matches the song to the length and shape of the road, and while the device is pure cinema, there's something of the magic trick to the way it's folded into an interactive experience.

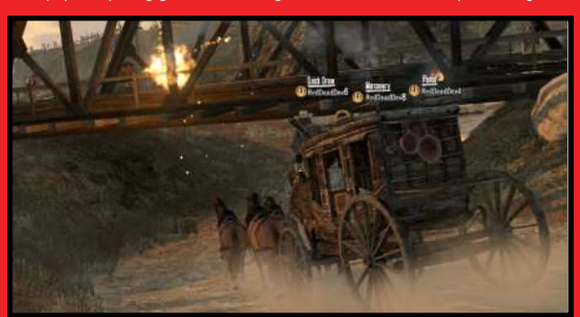
Later, the same trick is applied to Jamie Lidell's *Compass* as Marston rides hard from the mountains down to the Great Plains, where his family is waiting for him. If *Redemption* were consistently this deft, it would undoubtedly be one of the best games ever made. Unfortunately, it's let down by a sagging middle section as well as characters and side plots that don't contribute to the overall sweep of the thing.

After that dazzling introduction to Mexico, Marston fights for both sides in a civil war and guns down hundreds of men – most them while firing a Gatling gun from the back of a train. The player's choice of faction is meaningless, however: both sets of missions need to be completed, and Marston's tenuous reason to be involved at all turns the section into little more than padding. If the game ended with the completion of Marston's mission across the border, it'd be a case of a best-in-class opening that couldn't quite develop into a coherent game.

After Marston's time in Mexico, however, Rockstar achieves something remarkable. The game's pace and focus tighten, and the player's aims become aligned

» The origin of Marston's distinctive facial scars was not revealed until the game's long-anticipated sequel, *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

» Multiplayer lets you engage in various challenges, such as a deathmatch or capture the flag.



clearly with Marston's for the first time. As you fight initially to redeem his inner bandit and then to reclaim the life he has chosen, you explore the breadth of the character. The ending that follows is so affecting, and so accomplished in its execution, that it has arguably not been bettered since, even by its sequel, *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

When discussing the game's artistic successes, it is tempting to celebrate individuals, but this version of the Old West wasn't conquered by a handful of heroic pioneers. It was built, grain by grain, by the team at Rockstar San Diego. This staggering technical achievement is the scaffolding that supports everything else that *Red Dead Redemption* subsequently accomplishes. That this is the case for big-budget games in general is an even greater reminder of the need to remain conscious that these are ultimately collective works, not individual ones.

The myth of the Old West suited Rockstar. It reflected something of the developer's own individualism, an attitude to creativity that emphasises style, strength and independence. But a myth is still a myth, and while the notion of a lone star is a tempting romanticisation of Redemption's origin story, another American idiom – e pluribus unum, 'out of many, one' – is closer to the truth. *

"The ending is so affecting, and so accomplished in its execution, that it has arguably not been bettered since"

» The intricate detail in *Red Dead*'s expansive Old West world was the result of extensive research by the developers.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

THE LAST OF US

» You feel every last hit in *The Last Of Us*. It makes for a brutal experience.

INFO

» **Year:** 2013
» **Publisher:** Sony
» **Developer:** Naughty Dog
» **Key People:** Neil Druckmann (writer, director), Bruce Straley (director), Gustavo Santaolalla (composer), Jacob Minkoff (Designer)

GO DEEPER

» ***The Last Of Us*** **was the second best-selling game of 2013, losing out to** ***Grand Theft Auto V.***

» **The 'Balance Of Power' AI system sees enemies reacting to Joel and Ellie's on-screen actions.**

Critically acclaimed upon release, The Last Of Us rightly cemented Naughty Dog's position as developer of the generation. Darran Jones revisits its macabre masterpiece

THE BACKGROUND

We had a few concerns when *The Last Of Us* was first announced. It was the first time that Naughty Dog had created a second IP for a single generation of hardware and the first time it had split its staff to work on two separate games – one team on *The Last Of Us*, the other on *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*. Would the developer who had scored a direct hit with the adventures of Nathan Drake maintain that quality with a now divided team? We needn't have worried… When Sony publicly unveiled *The Last Of Us* at the 2011 Spike Video Game Awards it left little doubt that the talented first-party developer was once again on the verge of striking gaming gold.

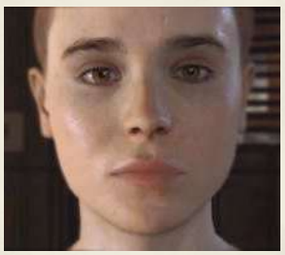
While *The Last Of Us* features many of the tropes associated with apocalyptic videogames, Naughty Dog was keen to put its own spin on the formula. The fearsome enemies that feature throughout its running time aren't zombies, but humans who have been infected by a strain of the Cordyceps fungus, which typically prey on ants and other insects. It also strayed away from the barren game worlds of *Fallout* and *Wasteland*, creating a verdant paradise where nature had reclaimed a world once populated by man. In short it felt completely different to everything that came before it.

THE GAME

It's rather telling that when people discuss *The Last Of Us* its actual game mechanics – despite their refinement – are rarely discussed before its characters or story. It's not due to them being weak, but more to do with the fact that the characters and story that feature in Naughty Dog's game are incredibly well crafted. Unlike many other big budget releases, these are characters that you care about, with even the most fleeting characters feeling fully fleshed out.

Like the very best books and movies, you'll find yourself continually discussing the motives of characters; their place in the bleak world that Naughty

Things of note



Acting up

The script and mo-cap may be excellent, but it's the voice acting throughout that really impresses. Troy Baker and Ashley Johnson really breathe life into Joel and Ellie.

DLC adventures

Naughty Dog has just released a new piece of DLC entitled *Left Behind* that tells Ellie's story before she met up with Joel. It's pricey, but fans will lap it up.

No more please

As far as we're concerned Joel and Ellie's story is finished. If you must return to *The Last Of Us* universe, Naughty Dog, do it with brand new characters please.

Multiplayer madness

The Last Of Us's multiplayer does a good job of capturing the brutality of the main game. While 'Supply Raid' is a deathmatch, 'Survivors' has you killing off every opponent.

You look familiar

When Ellie's character was first revealed she looked very similar to Juno star Ellen Page, who was quick to point out she was already involved with *Beyond: Two Souls*.

1 » There's a stark beauty to *The Last Of Us*'s setting, making it look distinctly different to games sharing a similar setting.

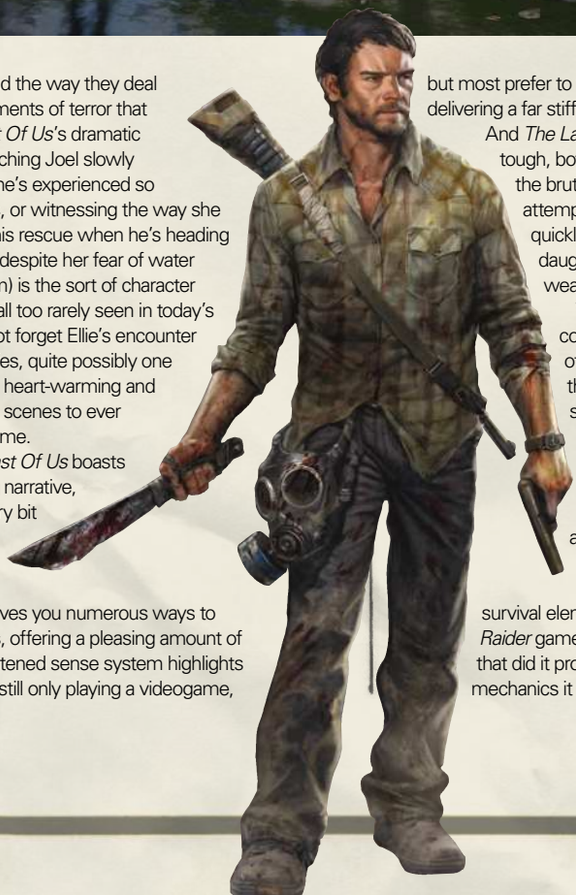
» There is a selection of enemies to contend with, from runners to deadly one-hit-and-you're-dead clickers.

» *The Last Of Us* cleaned up at the BAFTAs winning five awards, including Best Game.

What the press thought

Play
Score: 94%
"When *The Last Of Us* is good (winter), it's better than anything else this gen – we do not say *that* lightly."

games™
Score: 9/10
"Like *BioShock Infinite*, this is something that will live long in the memory and even longer in discussion."



Dog has created and the way they deal with the many moments of terror that punctuate *The Last Of Us*'s dramatic action scenes. Watching Joel slowly warm to Ellie after he's experienced so much personal loss, or witnessing the way she fearlessly leaps to his rescue when he's heading for a watery grave (despite her fear of water and inability to swim) is the sort of character progression that is all too rarely seen in today's games. And let's not forget Ellie's encounter with a herd of giraffes, quite possibly one of the most bizarre, heart-warming and hopefully optimistic scenes to ever appear in a videogame.

Although *The Last Of Us* boasts an incredibly strong narrative, its gameplay is every bit as good. Building on the blueprints first laid out by *Resident Evil 4*, it gives you numerous ways to clear most sections, offering a pleasing amount of flexibility. The heightened sense system highlights the fact that you're still only playing a videogame, but most prefer to turn these options off, delivering a far stiffer challenge.

And *The Last Of Us* is certainly tough, both in its encounters and the brutality of Joel's action as he attempts to protect Ellie, who quickly becomes his surrogate daughter as Druckmann weaves his narrative thread.

While hand-to-hand combat largely consists of repeatedly hammering the Square button, there's surprising weight to each blow, making you wince at the carnage that gets unleashed by both Joel and his human and mutated aggressors.

In a time when Square Enix was trumpeting the survival elements of its new *Tomb Raider* game, it was *The Last Of Us* that did it properly, making sure that the mechanics it introduced felt grounded in reality, rather than being simple buzzwords that didn't really make an impact in Crystal Dynamics' game. Take the way both development studios handle a near-fatal fall for its lead characters. One is up and running mere moments after it happens, the other leads to one of *The Last Of Us*'s strongest chapters. It goes back to Naughty Dog's understanding of how the passive world of cinema is best exploited by the more immediate nature of videogames and as a result *The Last Of Us* rarely puts a step wrong.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Few games put you through the emotional wringer like *The Last Of Us*. During its 15-odd hours, we laughed, cried and even punched the air in joy upon realising that a key character was still in the running – even the best triple-A releases don't elicit that range of emotions from us. Developers like Rockstar and Quantic Dreams may love movies, but it's Naughty Dog that truly understands how to weave an epic narrative between two vastly different mediums. If its *Uncharted* games were silly summer blockbusters, then *The Last Of Us* represents its bid for Oscar gold – nuanced, beautifully paced and leaving you discussing its ending long after it finishes. ✱

REMASTERING A CLASSIC

THE LAST OF US

Naughty Dog sends The Last Of Us out with a definitive edition for PlayStation 4

***The Last Of Us* for PS4 isn't the first 1080p remake for the new generation of consoles, but it might be the most difficult.** Other developers have had something of a head start, thanks to the combination of having already created high-quality PC versions and the PC-like architecture of PS4 and Xbox One. *The Last Of Us*, however, was made exclusively for one of the most tricky pieces of hardware developers have ever had to support. Worse, it's the pinnacle of technical achievements on the console, using an engine custom built for PS3 and code optimised to take advantage of every quirk of the hardware Naughty Dog discovered making PS3 games for seven years. Porting a game from PS3 to PS4, it seems, was much harder than it looks.

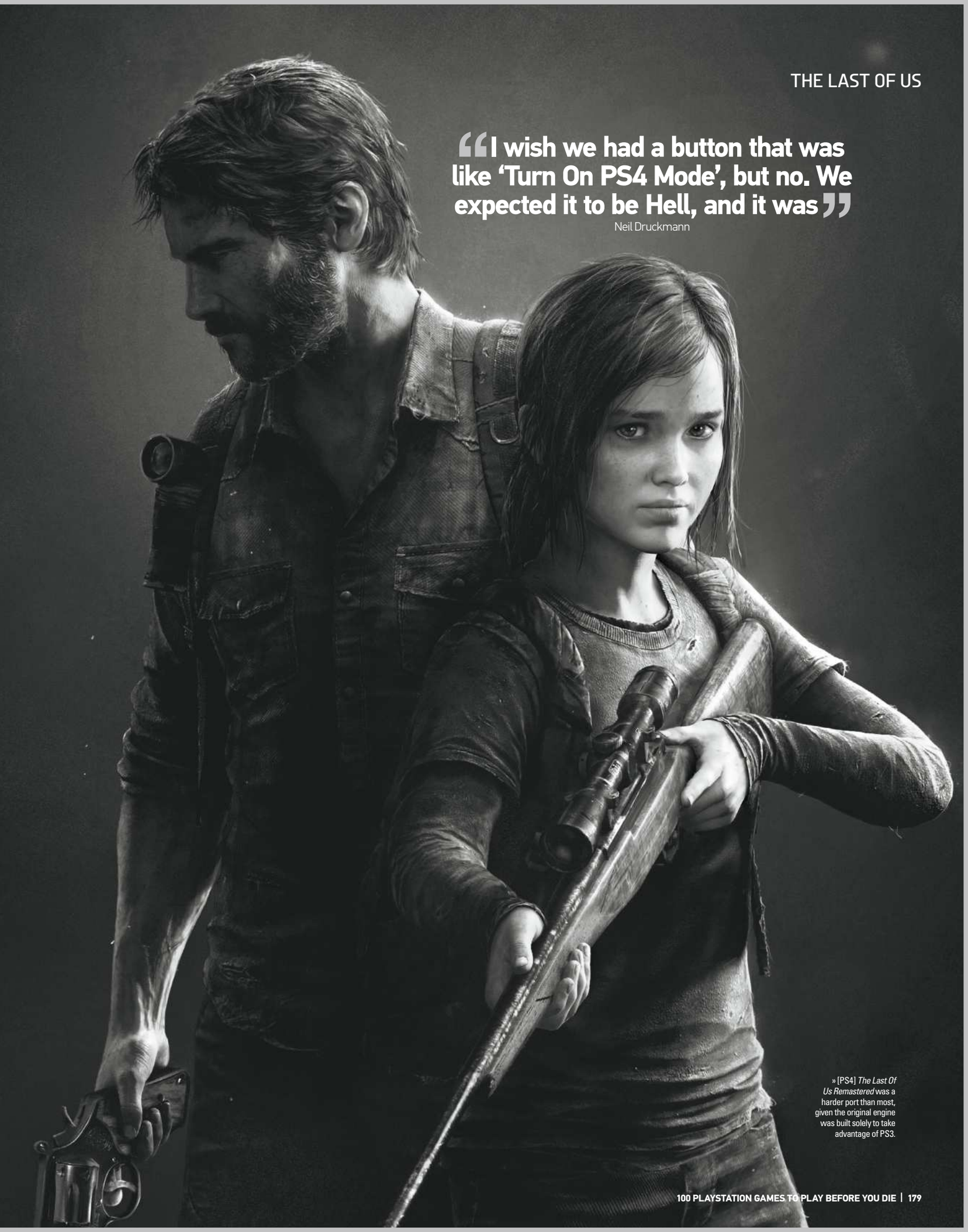
"I wish we had a button that was like 'Turn On PS4 Mode', but no," creative director Neil Druckmann says. "We expected it to be Hell, and it was Hell. Just getting an image onscreen, even an inferior one with the shadows broken, lighting broken and with it crashing every 30 seconds… that took a long time. These engineers are some of the best in the industry and they optimised the game so much for the PS3's SPUs specifically. It was optimised on a binary level, but after shifting those things over [to PS4] you have to go back to the high level, make sure the [game] systems are intact, and optimise it again. "I can't describe how difficult a task that is. And once it's running well, you're running the [versions] side by side to make sure you didn't screw something up in the process, like physics being slightly off, which throws the game off, or lighting being shifted and all of a sudden it's a drastically different look. That's not 'improved' any more; that's different. We want to stay faithful while being better."

Naughty Dog had only a handful of advantages when development began, shortly after completion of the game's *Left Behind* DLC. An audio commentary for the cutscenes had already been recorded, but was never used, and many models and textures already existed at a higher quality than could be put onscreen by a PS3. Character models built for cutscenes use more triangles than those in-game, and multiple versions of objects were built with higher-quality models swapped in and out depending on its prominence in the frame. On the PlayStation 4, those models could be used everywhere.

Rumour says *Gran Turismo 6*'s new car models were built to a level of detail far beyond PS3's GPU, future-proofing them for the inevitable *GT7*. *The Last Of Us* was never built to be ported or ▶

“I wish we had a button that was like ‘Turn On PS4 Mode’, but no. We expected it to be Hell, and it was”

Neil Druckmann



» [PS4] *The Last Of Us Remastered* was a harder port than most, given the original engine was built solely to take advantage of PS3.

▶ even with recycling in mind, but its assets were built in a similar fashion. "We always build the best possible assets and then we can make the call when things aren't fitting onscreen or in the frame buffer or in memory," Druckmann says. "That way we can pick and choose what we need to emphasise in a moment, and where there's a compromise on what can [be more detailed] or reduced to a lower quality. We don't build it with high assets in mind to then port it, but it did give us a leg up. If we hadn't done that, we might not have made the call to bring it over to PS4.

"**It still means rebuilding the assets, throwing them in, seeing how the new streaming works, working with the new hard drive and the new OS that you have to write whole new systems for.** We knew the areas that were problematic on the PS3, where we were hitting a technical bottleneck, so they were the easiest areas to improve. We brought in all the hi-res models, and then it's on par with what you saw in the cutscenes. There's an improved lighting model. After that, we started looking across the board; enemies look a little blurry up close, so that was pretty easy. We ramped those up and saw a pretty significant difference. Our cinematics are now running at 1080p and 60fps, and that involved rendering them all from scratch. It's interesting that now [instead of a technical bottleneck], the bottleneck is 'Can we fit all this on the disc?'"

The Last Of Us Remastered is an important piece of fan service – every time the developers conversed with Reddit, the request came up, even before the PS3 game's release – but it was also an important test of the studio's tools. "Going from PS2 to PS3, we actually had to throw out most of our work for the engine," Druckmann says. "We were using a proprietary programming language that was developed by Andy Gavin and some of the other programmers, so we knew when we started the engine that would support the first *Uncharted* game that we were engineering it with [the future] in mind. Going forward, we wanted to use that same engine on whatever platform we would eventually be working on. Even in the early days of PS3, we were thinking of the transition to PS4, because of how hard transitions have been in the past. One way to [test the tools] is to take an existing game and port it, and *The Last Of Us Remastered* gave us an excuse to bring those systems over, refine them and optimise them for the hardware.

"At first, there was a pretty small team of two or three programmers, experimenting and trying to answer the questions of what it would take to port it over, so we could decide whether it was worth it or not. We put in a pretty significant programming staff to port all the graphics systems over, the physics, the AI, the scripting language. It's not an insignificant team, but it's not as large as a full-scale production." Missing from the permanent team were the designers. Visuals aside, *The Last Of Us Remastered* is an untouched port, even going so far as to leave in common points of complaint, such as the difficulty spike when Joel, Tess and Ellie first arrive downtown. "[Game director] Bruce [Straley] and I always laugh about this," Druckmann says. "We have a really hard time playing the game, because we constantly see things and think, 'Oh, man, I could've done that better, I could've written that better, that animation pop over there, that transition…' but once you start going down that road, where do you stop? At what point are you making the experience just different or worse?

"*Star Wars* comes to mind. I'm more of a fan of the original cut and Han Solo shooting first. The *Metal Gear Solid* remake on GameCube [is good, but] I loved the original. I have so much attachment to that one that any shifts in the dialogue, or even in the moment-to-moment gameplay, [mean] something about it feels so different that it becomes inferior in my mind. It's only subjective, but there's something nice about saying, 'We've finished it'. That's what we put out there, that's the final experience – now it's just about a locked frame rate and all the hi-res textures and assets our artists created. I would like to say the game is the game, so I'd like to just bring it over to the PS4 and get a more solid version of the same experience."

> **"We constantly see things and think, 'Oh, man, I could've done that better, I could've written that better"**
> Neil Druckmann

Designers would work on the game to check systems, and it took a lot of work to figure out just how the reworked *The Last Of Us* would make use of the PS4's DualShock 4, with its triggers, sticks and touchpad. "Right now, it's still a straightforward port," Druckmann explained at the time, "but there are things I'd like to do. I love the feel of the triggers on the PS4, so I want to give the option to switch which triggers you use to shoot and which ones you're using to listen and crouch. Then there are some ideas of how to use the touchpad that we'll play with and see if it's worth it. Mostly, we don't want to mess with the experience too much, and we don't want to deviate from what made *The Last Of Us* so great."

The few additions are optional extras that were always intended to be enjoyed with the original game. The *Left Behind* DLC, set before the main story, will become available at the game's conclusion, and an audio commentary for the cutscenes will be available from the start. "That was something we did at the end of production for PS3," Druckmann says. "I don't remember if we could have fit it on the disc, but [it didn't matter because] we didn't have time to edit it. It's Troy Baker [Joel], Ashley Johnson [Ellie] and me sitting down and watching all the cinematics, talking about our experience of crafting those characters and bringing them to life. It will play through the cinematics and there will be an audio option to change from the regular audio to the behind-the-scenes commentary."

With the addition of the DLC and commentary atop the visual overhaul, this will be the definitive version of *The Last Of Us*,

HAVE A LITTLE FAITH

■ Asked about lessons learned during development on *The Last Of Us*, one in particular jumps to Druckmann's mind. "One of the things Bruce [Straley] and I have been talking about is to trust the process, trust the team, keep the faith," he says. "You start with an idea that you're really excited by, and then after three or more years, you know you're failing. You're trying something new and it's not working out. To have the confidence to say that it's OK is the thing. For me, personally I had moments where I was really stressed and thinking it wouldn't come together and I lost the faith. I forgot how, as a studio, as a team, we all come together at the very end and just make it work under the pressure of a deadline. At the end, you fire on all cylinders; the game makes huge strides at the very end. When you're starting a new project and you're getting that initial excitement you have to remember that failure and low points are part of the process of making something new and fresh. Maybe that will keep me a little healthier going forward."

Druckmann says. But illustrating the sheer amount of work that's gone into remastering the game is a challenge nobody ever anticipated. A half-decade or more of publishers' bullshots created in Photoshop or produced by monster PCs outputting a 4K image has made selling the visual quality of new generation games a difficult task, and the online spaces games are marketed in aren't up to the task of showing off *The Last Of Us Remastered*.

"How do you show it on the Internet? Any next-gen game?" Druckmann asks. "We have the game running in 1080p at 60fps, and YouTube brings it down to 30fps and does a compression on it, and it's hard to tell the difference. When you see it running on your big TV and you see all the hi-res assets running smoothly, it's hard to go back to the previous version after that, but it's hard to show all the work, the optimisation and the artistry that went into it. We're still trying to figure out what the best way to do that is. We tried to put a non-compressed version of the trailer running at 60Hz for people to download, but it's several hundred MBs. It's a huge file. Maybe there's something on PSN where we can make this stuff available, but it's something we have to address."

The end result is "akin to looking at a DVD versus Blu-ray," Druckmann says. "It's not a totally brand-new experience, but when you're seeing the film, the clarity of the image is much closer to how the director and the team initially saw it. There's something nice about that. I think if there was nothing but remakes, that would be pretty sad for the console. Just like any system out there, any medium, it's going to be a mixture. We're working on this re-release, but at the same time we're working on two other brand-new experiences. When Blu-ray came out, the first thing is you buy all these rereleases of movies that you've loved, and then you see *Gravity* and you can't wait to see it on your Blu-ray. There's always room for a mixture of old and new. "

It is, says Druckmann, the very beginning of what Naughty Dog can achieve on PlayStation 4. "If you look at *Uncharted 1* and then look at *Uncharted 3* or *The Last Of Us*, you'll see a pretty big difference as we have a better understanding of the hardware and how to build assets for it. So while I believe you'll see a big improvement between *The Last Of Us* on PS3 and PS4, we're just getting started with the new generation." ★

» [PS4] Models used in cutscenes now run natively in-game. The subtler details will be wasted when the camera sits so far from players, but every detail counts at 1080p.

THE MAKING OF HORIZON ZERO DAWN

How Killzone's maker turned its back on the military shooter and headed into open new world

Words by Alex Wiltshire

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SIE
- **» DEVELOPER:** GUERRILLA GAMES
- **» RELEASED:** 2017
- **» PLATFORM:** PS4

Guerrilla Games knew it was taking a risk. Here was a studio that had focused entirely on *Killzone* for the best part of a decade, yet now it was embarking on a project which, by its very design, would naturally render obsolete a great deal of its craft. Guerrilla knew how to make linear, firstperson, sci-fi shooters. It hadn't made an open-world game before. And so it was only natural that it got cold feet.

Horizon Zero Dawn was born in response to an internal call for pitches Guerrilla made in 2009, near the end of development of *Killzone 3*. It was time, management believed, for the studio to stretch its wings and try something new, and between 30 and 40 pitches came in, each reviewed by managing director Hermen Hulst and Guerrilla's board. The brief was no puzzle games and no racing games: other studios did them better. An action game, then, which catered to a wide but traditional gaming audience, and which would leverage the studio's considerable strengths in technology and visual design. "That's why *Horizon* was such a good match," says game director Mathijs de Jonge.

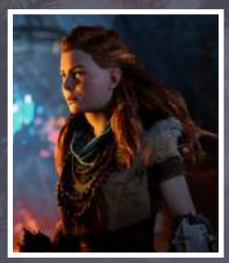
> **"It was too close to Killzone – we noticed ourselves falling back into the same visual design"**
> Mathijs de Jonge

Studio art director Jan-Bart van Beek had submitted an idea for an open-world action-RPG about a woman living in a future roamed by giant war robots, in which nature had grown over the civilisation of the past. "It was also a hard and very difficult match because we had no open-world experience," de Jonge continues. "We had no idea how to design a game like that." Once another verdant post-apocalypse had appeared in the form of Ninja Theory's *Enslaved: Odyssey To The West*, Guerrilla decided to work on another pitch, an action game about killing monsters in a fantastical alternative-history world similar to that of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. But when it was time to pitch Sony, Guerrilla got cold feet again. It had been gazumped one more time, this time by *The Order: 1886*, and besides, there was something about *Horizon* that kept drawing the team back. Hulst pitched both games; *Horizon* attracted the strongest feeling.

Horizon got the go-ahead, then, but Guerrilla wanted to play it safe. Knowing it would release on the then-next-generation PlayStation, the studio opted to make another game, *Killzone Shadow Fall*, as a launch title, and begin developing *Horizon Zero Dawn* on the side. "We felt it was good to be there at launch," technical director Michiel van der Leeuw tells us. It would give the team the chance to grasp what the PS4 was capable of within a familiar genre and series, rather than with a completely new one. "We were pretty scared, but it was even more scary to do a generation switch and a genre switch at the same time." And so until *Shadow Fall* was complete, *Horizon* was given an extended pre-production phase with just 14 developers, with *Shadow Fall* acting as an important testing ground. For one thing, a couple of its levels were much larger and more open than those found in previous *Killzone* games, giving the studio a chance to explore the technical and design implications of open worlds. Moreover, the two games shared the same engine, Decima, and features were added to *Shadow Fall* with *Horizon*'s needs in mind, such as enhanced lighting and atmospherics and foliage systems.

"We were mainly just afraid of what was going to happen next," van der Leeuw says. "Open-world streaming was much more challenging than the linear things we were used to, even though we experimented with non-linearity in *Shadow Fall*. We had no idea how to script an open world.

» [PS4] A fan favorite character, Aloy has since become somewhat for a mascot for Playstation



In non-linear worlds you can pick up a quest and wander off and do something else, and we had no idea how the scripting would deal with the complexities of the logic that required." But the largest challenge for his team was in providing the rest of the studio with the tools they'd need to make all the things that such a large world would demand. Work on the systems which helped create and manage characters, places and things, and the questing solution that would bind them together, would continue until the very end of development.

But back at the project's beginning, the *Horizon* team was thinking more about what that world would be. Van Beek's pitch provided the bones of the concept – ancient cities overtaken by nature, tribespeople and machines living in their shadows – but it needed a lot of fleshing out. "If you look back at the images of that pitch, things were presented in a very different way," van der Leeuw

DEVELOPER Q&A

MATHIJS DE JONGE Game Director

Why a female lead character?
Aloy was in the initial pitch, and the way she was presented was more like Sarah Connor from *Terminator* or Ripley from *Aliens*, so she was a very strong female lead. After many years of *Killzone* games, with stereotypical male Marine leads, we felt it was a nice change of direction. But there were doubts along the way, for sure, like Shu's [Sony's Worldwide Studios president Shuhei Yoshida]. We explored many directions for her; it wasn't easy to shape her, but I'm glad we didn't give her up.

How did you learn the craft of open-world game design?
We're not only developers, but gamers, too, and we play a lot of open-world games. It was our desire to go towards this kind of game development because as designers we felt like we wanted to expand our capabilities. In playing open-world games you get some references, of course, but we also realised we needed to hire experts who had made them before, like our lead quest designer [David Ford, who worked on *EverQuest* and *The Elder Scrolls Online*]

How did you approach designing the beginning of the game?
We felt we had to gradually open up the world and slowly soak players into it. The story starts with Aloy as a baby; it's very slow and we wondered if players might not be patient, but we needed to tell this story right as the first in a new franchise, and to get this attachment to Aloy. The game at the opening is narrow, and slowly opens up, giving tastes of the open world, so we can direct what mechanics are used and which machines we reveal.

says. "It's easy to look at the finished game and think that from those ideas, only *Horizon* could have been made, but we had thousands of options back then. What kind of weapons would the tribes have? What would the machines look like?" The early answers seemed to lie in *Killzone*. The first prototypes used its M82 rifle, and the robots were militaristic. "The machines in the initial pitch were more nightmarish, like insects or war machines with lots of turrets and cannons on them," says de Jonge. "Style-wise they didn't look unique; they looked like they could be from lots of other games or movies."

"It was too close to *Killzone* – we noticed ourselves falling back into the same visual design," principal designer Dennis Zopfi says. "It felt like we were making the same game with a slightly different wrapper." Anxious to rid the machines of their nightmarish feel, they started to make them animalistic. The first machine that clinched the feeling they were grasping for was the Thunderjaw, a towering T-rex of a robot which came together in July 2011. The team crudely modelled a forest, put Thunderjaw-like blockmesh machines into it, and gave the players a primitive-looking outfit. "That gave us a unique mix, a look that Horizon could have," says de Jonge. "It was interesting: these machines had pieces that could be like puzzles in how you fight them, taking off their armour. We realised it was something we should focus on." Shooting parts off a machine added a layer of strategy to combat which inspired such new ideas as the ability to remove its weapons and use them against it.

"When we added that rudimentary open world we started seeing the machines push aside trees," says Zopfi. "That connection with the world – we hadn't seen an open-world game with large creatures crashing through trees before. It really solidified that idea." They sketched out truly vast Tallnecks which added a sense of majesty to the machines, and then modelled the raptor-like Watchers, the first machines to be animated. "They had a character, a role that was special, and watching them push tall grass aside was really interesting," de Jonge says. "They didn't feel like you were fighting a machine, but an animal," Zopfi adds. "It was the right direction."

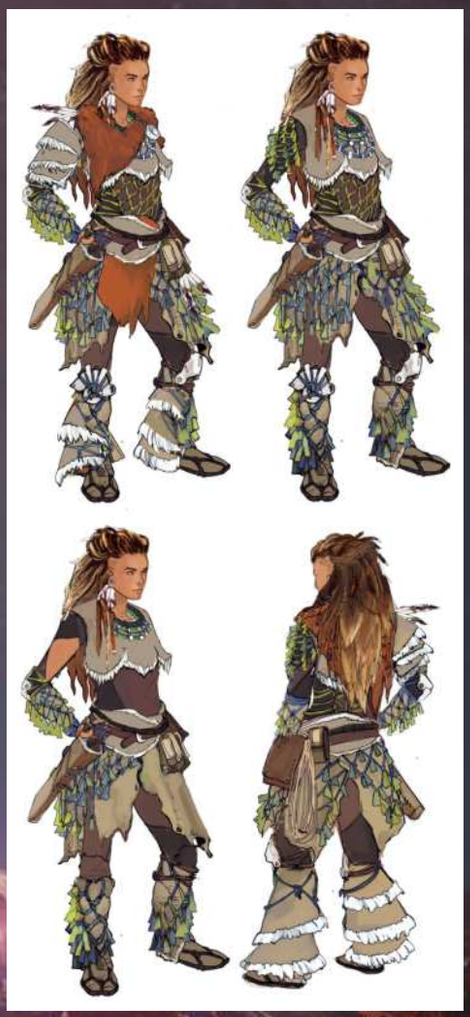
> "We hadn't seen an open-world game with large creatures crashing through trees before"
> Mathijs de Jonge

It had taken a long time to get there, but after this breakthrough, *Horizon*'s thematic development started to move very fast. But it raised a new problem. De Jonge and van Beek had worked together before to write *Killzone* games, but this altogether bigger game presented new challenges and they found their original idea for the story just didn't mesh with the creative direction the game was taking. They looked at open-world games they admired and hired John Gonzalez, creative design lead of *Fallout: New Vegas*. He tore the game apart over the six months he spent re-writing it, but kept to the original core ideas: a female lead living in a post-apocalyptic world dominated by machines. Now, though, the story would be about a woman called Aloy searching for her mother. He fleshed out the identity of the tribe she came from, as well as wider things about the world, often affecting the game's design in the process. As the machines became more animalistic, the team figured they'd have predator types feeding on herbivores, but Gonzalez's story had them as a single faction. He also nixed horses. Aloy was originally meant to ride one, but since anyone can ride a horse and she was meant to be extraordinary, he decided that she'd uniquely be able to hack machines and ride them instead.

When *Shadow Fall* released in November 2013, *Horizon*'s 14-strong development team was suddenly joined by 200 new colleagues, and work was meant to begin in earnest. "There were two problems we had to conquer," says character art director Dan Calvert, whose team's job was to populate the world with its people. "The first was that we had to make so much stuff. And the second, which is literally the worst to have in combination, was that these 200 people, all with ideas and crazy ambitions, were in an environment where there were loads of ideas and not many decisions." But rather than wait for clear answers to their questions, Calvert's solution was to simply start making things. "We got stuck in on day one," he says, "and never really stopped."

Though they had a strong story backbone, Aloy's tribe and the Carja only had the start of a visual identity, while the Banuk and Oseram were completely blank slates. Calvert and his team began to research methodically; their clothing would communicate who these people were. The Nora had to feel standoffish, the kind of people who might make Aloy an outcast, but on the other hand they had to be appealing. They were meant to be hunter-gatherers, so research initially nudged them towards wearing animal furs, but when large animals were removed from the game, the Nora suddenly had nothing to wear. OK, so now they

» Guerrilla had predator machines feeding on herbivore types, until the story made them all part of one faction.



» Aloy's many sets of clothing generally express the Nora's cultural values, using machine parts in a functional way..

» [PS4] Vegetation across the map is procedurally generated according to rules designed by Guerrilla's artists to define patterns of growth dependent on region, distance to water and many other factors. The results are some pretty breathtaking scenery.

were machine hunters, and they'd wear machine parts instead of fur. "But integrating machine parts was extremely difficult," says Calvert. "We spent literally months on that."

It was important that there was some kind of reason why the Nora would use these parts, and it had to contrast with the way other tribes would use them. For the Banuk, machines had spiritual power, so they'd use their parts as totems which imbued them with the machines' power. Among the Nora, the matriarchs would use parts as jewellery to show their status, and for hunters it was functional armour. Moreover, the Nora lacked the technology to cut and shape the parts, so they could only be worn as whole components. The more advanced Carja, on the other hand, could shape them. These rules introduced challenges. If the machine parts fitted the characters too well they'd look too deliberate. "The phrase we disparagingly used was 'techno Viking'," Calvert says. But if they looked too ad hoc, they'd say it looked too *Mad Max*. They took parts out of the machines' 3D models and kitbashed them together in order to strike a balance between the two.

Development continued, *Horizon*'s size achieved through smart decisions. Calvert's team started out making generic characters; only later did it move on to the bespoke ones that players tend to notice. Quests were ranked, so important ones were given time and attention while the more trivial ones were allowed to be more freewheeling and avoid distracting the game's leads. The game was announced at E3 2015 to a response which immediately focused on the same elements into which Guerrilla had invested so much work: its scale, its machines, its heroine. A year after its March 2017 launch, it had sold 7.6 million copies. The risk paid off, and has left Guerrilla stronger, and not simply for having made a hit. "People are less nervous when we see a new concept or pitch in a new genre, because now we know that *Horizon* was scary and a big risk but worth the effort," says de Jonge. "We're probably more flexible for the future."

"When I was working on *Shadow Fall*, *Horizon* looked like a dream project," says Calvert. "A premise that gets everyone excited, crazy-ambitious and yet big enough that every one of 200 people could put a part of themselves in it. It was big and scary, but it was a dream."

The 20 Greatest PlayStation Games

YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

Though it was a hugely successful console, there's more to the PlayStation than million-selling mega hits. Nick Thorpe leads the expedition to unearth some hidden gems…

Rapid Reload

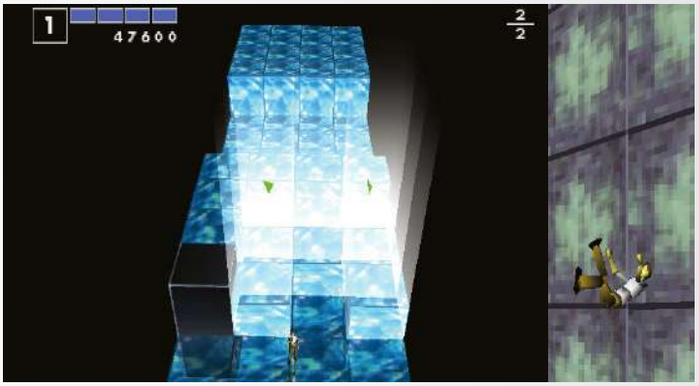
■ **DEVELOPER:** MEDIA VISION ■ **YEAR:** 1995 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **This run-and-gunner** made an appearance at the PlayStation's European launch, but it was passed over by a public hungry for the 3D games that were still a huge novelty at the time and that's a real shame. Though its visuals were only slightly enhanced over the capabilities of the SNES, the game itself was a riot. Developers Media Vision were very clearly influenced by Treasure's *Gunstar Heroes (*a fact evident in the original Japanese title *Gunner's Heaven*), and while it's not quite as good as the Mega Drive classic, it packs much of the same appeal with loads of on-screen carnage and some impressive weaponry. PAL copies are scarce, but it shouldn't be too hard to track down the Japanese version.

Kurushi

■ **DEVELOPER:** G-ARTISTS
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

19 ***Kurushi* enjoyed a** relatively high profile due to its placement on demo discs, but very few people actually appear to have picked it up. Set on a platform of floating blocks, you play as a man whose goal is to survive by clearing waves of massive blocks rolling towards him, while avoiding the black penalty blocks. Failure to do so correctly will result in the platform shortening, giving less room to tackle the oncoming waves. It's a tricky puzzler, which boasts an oppressive atmosphere thanks to its stark aesthetic – it's just you, the blocks and the endless darkness that waits below. There's also a sequel available titled *Kurushi Final*, which adds extra game modes for the most hardcore players.



"Kurushi is a tricky puzzler, with an oppressive atmosphere thanks to its dark aesthetic"

Pepsiman

■ **DEVELOPER:** KID ■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

18 **Many years before** the likes of *Temple Run* popularised the runner sub-genre on mobile phones, Japanese gamers got to experience the genre as a soft drink tie-in. *Pepsiman* sees our near-mute hero sprinting from destination to destination in order to ensure that people get their Pepsi. Thankfully, the game frequently throws up ridiculous situations in order to keep the action fresh – our hero can be found running while stuck inside a bin, or being chased by a giant can of Pepsi. Despite being a Japanese game the voice acting is all in English, so this is a remarkably import-friendly release – but it's tough enough to be unfriendly to players.

Tombi!

■ **DEVELOPER:** WHOOPEE CAMP ■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORM

17 **The Koma Pigs** have stolen a bracelet from Tombi's grandfather, and that's something he just won't stand for. As a result, our pink-haired protagonist sets out on a quest to retrieve it, while leaping on pigs and chucking them about the place. It's all rather uncivilised, but he is a caveman after all. This adventure platformer isn't divided into stages, but calls to mind the formula of the later *Wonder Boy* games as it takes place as one long quest, in which, you'll always be pursuing multiple goals at the same time.

The high quality of Tombi's first adventure didn't ensure sales success, and the game was overlooked upon release, being seen as outdated due to its 2D gameplay. A sequel with fully 3D visuals was released later on, but it too failed to find a great deal of success and Whoopee Camp disbanded shortly afterwards. As a result, both *Tombi!* and its sequel are rare and expensive games, with the original typically changing hands for £50 or more.

World's Scariest Police Chases

■ **DEVELOPER:** UDS ■ **YEAR:** 2001 ■ **GENRE:** DRIVING

16 **Though the launch** of the PlayStation 2 in 2000 drew a lot of attention away from its older sibling, the PlayStation still had plenty left to offer players that stuck around through its later years. This excellent and oft-overlooked licensed driving game is testament to that – it plays a lot like *Driver*, but with the player cast more definitely on the good side of the law. Chasing down criminals and ramming them off the road is the order of the day and if they're particularly hard targets, you'll be authorised to use firearms to assist in their capture. John Bunnell, the host of the TV series, provides the voiceover work for each mission in the dramatic tone that has made him famous. It's easy to pre-emptively dismiss the game thanks to its licence, but give it a go – you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Incredible Crisis

■ **DEVELOPER:** POLYGON MAGIC
■ **YEAR:** 1999 ■ **GENRE:** PARTY

14 **You might have** had a bad day at work, but nothing like what poor Taneo has to deal with. Things start going wrong when a massive globe begins to crash through his office, and quickly escalate to plummeting elevators, shocking quizzes from paramedics and more. What's more, this mini-game collection succeeds primarily because it's a lot of fun and packs in a good amount of content – 24 mini-games should provide plenty of variety. However, *Incredible Crisis* also achieves the rare feat of being an intentionally funny videogame thanks to some strong visual gags. The game surprisingly managed to receive a worldwide release, so you shouldn't run into much trouble trying to acquire it.

Suzuki Bakuhatsu

■ **DEVELOPER:** SOL ■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

15 **Sometimes, it's hard** to be a woman in Japan. You wake up, thinking it's going to be a relatively normal day, and then you try to eat an orange – but it turns out that the orange is a bomb. Luckily, our protagonist just happens to be the daughter of a bomb disposal expert, which is a good job because she runs into disguised explosive devices *all the time*. Yes, it's another odd game in which heavily stylised cutscenes meet bizarre objectives, as our protagonist has to defuse devices concealed as guns and even the moon.

The actual gameplay involves deactivating bombs by carefully removing screws and cutting wires. Devices gradually become more complex, and certain moves will make others inaccessible so you have to consider your options, while also being mindful of the game's time limit. Further complicating matters, you'll often come up against dead ends and traps, meaning that one wrong move can see you rest in pieces. As you might have guessed, *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* is an import game. The screen text is all in Japanese but the game is generally intuitive enough to be playable without knowledge of the language.

"There's a lot of depth to Devil Dice. The main puzzle mechanics are well constructed and the puzzle mode delivers lots of challenging problems"

Tobal 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** DREAMFACTORY
■ **YEAR:** 1997 ■ **GENRE:** FIGHTING

13 **While its predecessor** gained a worldwide release, *Tobal 2* was unfortunately confined to Japan. That means that most gamers haven't experienced one of the most interesting fighting games of the 32-bit era, which features some interesting innovations from *Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken* director Seiichi Ishii. Chief amongst these is a complex grapple system, which is unmatched in most one-on-one fighters due to the increased prominence of clinch strikes and transitions more common in pro wrestling and MMA games. Another factor setting the game apart is its RPG-style quest mode, a huge addition to the game, which grants access to dozens of unlockable fighters. All of this is represented with high-resolution visuals at 60 frames per second, which show off Akira Toriyama's outlandish character designs. There will never be another fighter like it, so be sure to give it a try.

Terracon

■ **DEVELOPER:** PICTURE HOUSE
■ **YEAR:** 2000
■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

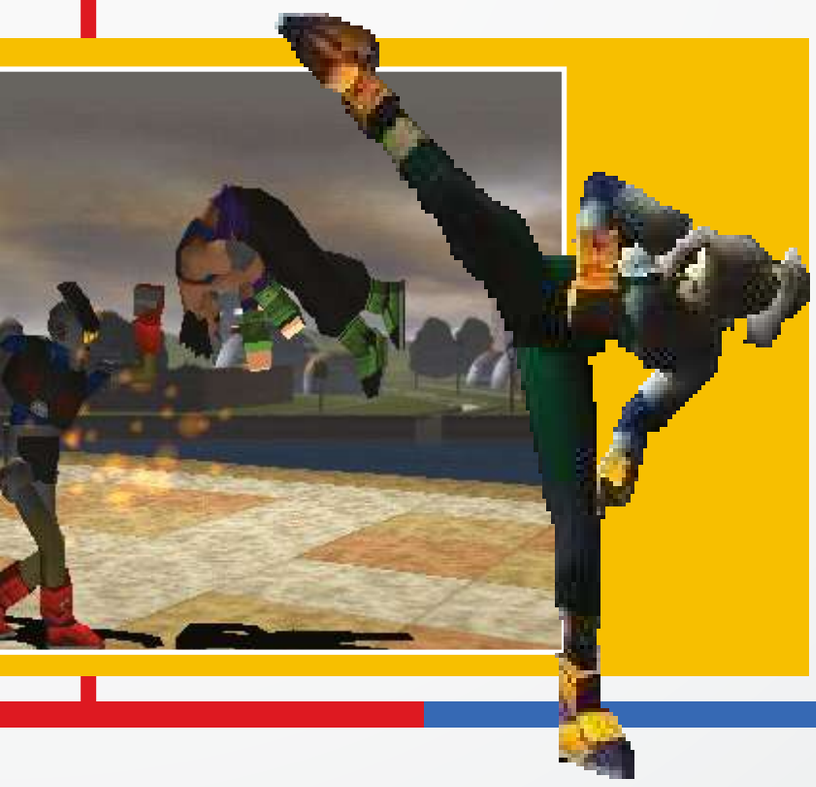
12 **Everything was going** fine for Xed the alien, until the Terracon went mad and started destroying planets. Now it's up to you to stop it, by running around, destroying enemies and completing objectives. Created by a team of developers that banded together after working on *Die Hard Trilogy* together, *Terracon* is a technically impressive game with huge, open 3D environments and excellent special effects including some awesome lighting in night time scenes. Unfortunately, despite receiving good reviews, this European exclusive game failed to find an audience back in 2000 as the world was preoccupied with the forthcoming next-generation consoles.

Devil Dice

■ **DEVELOPER:** SHIFT
■ **YEAR:** 1998 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE

11 **We're prone to** describing puzzle games as devilishly challenging, and this one doesn't even attempt to hide its satanic allegiances. This is a block-matching puzzler, in which the goal is to match faces on six-sided dice by running them around the grid. While you're on top of the dice, each step rolls them over – when you're on the floor with them, they'll slide around on the bottom face instead of rotating. Each face needs to be matched with the appropriate number of its counterparts – twos are easy to clear but sixes are much harder. However, higher numbers bring higher rewards.

There's a lot of depth to *Devil Dice*. The main puzzle mechanics are well constructed and the puzzle mode delivers lots of challenging pre-set problems featuring variant rule sets, such as different floors and immovable metal blocks. If you enjoy it, there's an even more obscure PS2 sequel called *Bombastic*.



Power Diggerz

■ **DEVELOPER:** TAITO ■ **YEAR:** 2000 ■ **GENRE:** PARTY

10 **No, we haven't** got the genre wrong – in a just world, *Power Diggerz* would be remembered as one of the best mini-game collections ever to hit the market. The game sees you placed in charge of some heavy-duty construction equipment, performing tasks like scooping sand, tearing down buildings and clearing paths blocked by volcanic rocks. However, the serious stuff isn't the reason why *Power Diggerz* is so appealing – the real joy lies in the mini-games, in which you perform bizarre tasks like scooping turtles from a swimming pool and serving curry onto giant plates. If you can think of a bizarre way to utilise a power shovel, it's probably in this game.

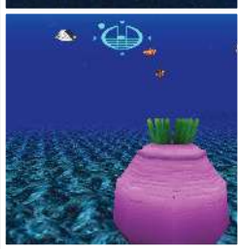
The game is put together fantastically well, and offers the multiplayer mode required to become a proper party classic. Unfortunately, there is one particular flaw that keeps it from reaching its full potential – the control system. While intuitive and responsive it uses every button on the pad and thus requires players to spend some time learning to play properly. It's clearly been done for the love of heavy machinery, which the game exhibits in spades – all the vehicles are licensed Komatsu models. You certainly can't accuse Taito of failing to make the most of the game's subject matter.

Power Diggerz seemed to have everything going for it upon release – it went down well with the press, earning scores as high as 92% in Play, and hit the shelves at a budget price. It's even got the universal sign of high quality: an intentionally misspelled title which uses Z to pluralise a word. Unfortunately, by the time the game made the journey to international audiences in 2001, much of the gaming market had already moved on to newer consoles. Go back and pick up a copy, because you'll really *dig* it.

Aquanaut's Holiday

■ **DEVELOPER:** ARTDINK
■ **YEAR:** 1995 ■ **GENRE:** SIMULATION

9 **Artdink was unafraid** to experiment with Sony's console, leading to this undersea exploration game. Much of the action involves simply exploring the ocean, searching for fish, crabs and the like as well as occasionally finding unusual landmarks, such as ruins of sunken cities. As you explore, you gain more resources in order to build an artificial reef to attract marine life, with the ultimate goal being to gather as much stuff as possible in one area. It's a very slow-paced game with little in the way of traditional structure, but the experience is worthwhile – there really isn't much like this on any console, and it serves to highlight the diverse range of software available on the PlayStation.



Sheep Dog 'N' Wolf

DEVELOPER: INFOGRAMES LYON HOUSE
YEAR: 2001 **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

8 **Ralph Wolf, a** cousin of Wile E Coyote, is the newest contestant on a game show where he can steal all the sheep he wants – and since it's fun to be the bad guy, that's your goal. That means that you've got to sneak around Sam the sheepdog in stealth sections, before luring sheep to the goal – and if you want to do that, you'll need to use cartoon logic to solve the game's puzzles, like laying a trail of lettuce to tempt a sheep into place, or launching them using a big rock formation as a see-saw. It's one of the cleverest uses of a cartoon licence we can recall, and doesn't deserve to have been forgotten.

Sanvein

DEVELOPER: SUCCESS
YEAR: 2000 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

7 **This kind of** shoot-'em-up wasn't the most popular type of game on the market by the time it reached the West, and it was pushed out by budget publishers as a result. While the game offers a decent weapon choices, *Sanvein*'s stark blue aesthetic and simplistic arena shooting might feel off-putting, as it's quite easy to bumble along for a while and eventually die without ever quite knowing why. However, spending some time with the game reveals its hidden depths.

The trick is that each stage is only meant to last for a very brief time – get in, blow things up, then get back to the hexagonal stage map. It's an important feature of the game, as your progress through the map determines your power for the next stage, so it's imperative to clear around bosses before you take them on. However, you're up against the clock and each hit takes away precious seconds, and beating bosses is the only way to recover time. The result is that a seemingly brainless shooter actually offers an exciting strategic balance of risk and reward, for those who are willing to find it.

"Harmful Park is a comedy shoot-'em-up in the same manner of Konami's Parodius series"

Harmful Park

DEVELOPER: SKY THINK SYSTEMS
YEAR: 1997 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

6 **The PlayStation isn't** as well-recognised for its 2D games as the Saturn, but games like this prove that its non-polygonal offerings shouldn't be discounted. *Harmful Park* is a comedy shoot-'em-up in the same manner as Konami's *Parodius* series. The well-designed stages see you fighting off diverse enemies including gorillas, inflatable dinosaurs and gigantic women. This appears to have been the final game produced by Sky Think Systems, and as a Japan-only release it's not easy to get hold of – original copies regularly sell for over £100. Thankfully, for those of you with access to a Japanese PSN account, it's available digitally on PlayStation platforms for a lower price of ¥600 – less than £5.

iS: Internal Section

DEVELOPER: POSITRON
YEAR: 1999 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

5 **The most immediately** striking thing about *iS: Internal Section* is its visuals. While the PlayStation's hardware allowed for diverse approaches to 3D visuals, most developers stuck with the standard texture-mapped polygons – not so *Positron*. The abstract flat-shaded polygon visuals of *Internal Section* allowed the developer to crank up the resolution and frame rate, creating a game that has aged remarkably gracefully. The game itself is a tube-based shooter in the same manner as *Tempest* and *N2O*, with some interesting twists including a selection of 12 unique weapons and boss battles in which you can adjust the size of the tube. It's another Japan-only release, but screen text is predominantly in English so don't worry about the language barrier.

Guardian's Crusade

DEVELOPER: TAMSOFT
YEAR: 1998 **GENRE:** RPG

4 ***Guardian's Crusade* is** an RPG that takes aim at a slightly younger age group than most on the PlayStation, but one which keeps you playing thanks to a solid grasp of the genre's fundamentals. The most obvious concession to the younger audience, other than the relatively light tone, is the monster-raising aspect. If you put in the effort, your companion can be moulded into a formidable fighting partner to aid you on your journey. The game is also renowned for its high-quality translation, besting others of its era by managing to retain much of the humour inherent in the original Japanese script.

Kula World

DEVELOPER: GAME DESIGN SWEDEN AB
YEAR: 1998 **GENRE:** PUZZLE

3 **This abstract puzzler** is a real gem, and one of the best mental workouts available on the PlayStation. Each stage takes place in a floating structure comprised of interconnected cubes, and your goal is to guide a beach ball around them, in order to collect keys before reaching the exit. This sounds simple, but is made much more complex by the game's convenient physics – rolling over the edge of a cube won't result in an untimely plummet, but instead a reorientation of gravity. This means that each stage has six different floor surfaces and can be approached in a number of different ways, but the area you want to be in will always be tantalisingly difficult to actually reach. With over 150 stages, *Kula World* will keep you occupied for a long time.

Kula World is an uncommon release, meaning that many of the players who were interested in the full game never got to try it. That rarity meant that copies used to change hands for as much as £50, but it's now much easier to obtain thanks to cheap digital re-releases. Even original copies shouldn't set you back more than around £25 now, with US imports coming in even cheaper.

LSD: Dream Emulator

DEVELOPER: OUTSIDE DIRECTORS COMPANY
YEAR: 1998 **GENRE:** SIMULATION

2 ***LSD* is one** of the weirdest games on the PlayStation. It tries to simulate the experience of dreaming, and requires you to wander around surreal landscapes. These settings range from realistic historical landscapes to completely abstract dreamscapes, and are populated by characters ranging from humans to ghostly apparitions, animated teddy bears, and more. In any case you'll want to interact with discretion – touching walls and objects will move you to a new environment instantly. *LSD* was a title that exceeded the inaccessibility of most import titles, in that was beyond the reach of most gamers due to its high price – you'd be lucky to find a copy for less than £150. Thankfully, a release on the Japanese PSN has made it more accessible to gamers with a modern console.

No One Can Stop Mr Domino!

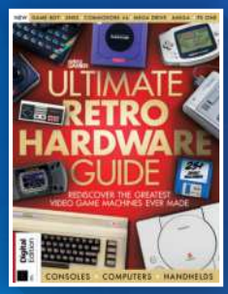
DEVELOPER: ARTDINK **YEAR:** 1998 **GENRE:** ACTION-PUZZLE

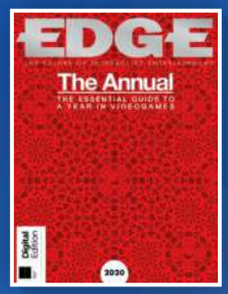
1 **Laying a great** line of dominoes is a tricky job at the best of times – one false move and all your time is wasted. So you've got to feel for poor Mr Domino, our titular hero in this game, who has to do so while avoiding obstacles and laying the dominoes from his own back. Yes indeed, it's another weird one – which is perhaps no surprise, given that Artdink's other game in this list is *Aquanaut's Holiday.*

At its core, *Mr Domino* is a score attack puzzle game – your goal is to lay trails of dominoes leading to trick points while you run a predetermined circuit. When you hit your second lap, you'll be able to knock down the previously-laid dominoes and set off the tricks. If you started your chain from the right place, you can even perform trick combos! Of course, as you try to set up your lines you'll be accosted by cats, vegetables and even the odd sumo wrestler. You also have a limited number of dominoes to work with and strict time limits to adhere to, making this a trickier game than you might imagine from just looking at it.

While the gameplay is perfectly good, much of Mr *Domino*'s appeal comes from just how weird it is. Your protagonist's tricks quickly escalate from knocking down towers of cards to causing a housewife to discover a bomb in her oven, and later causing a meteor strike. While it's all played off as humour, we do wonder how sympathetic this protagonist is really meant to be…

Discover the origins of all your favourite characters





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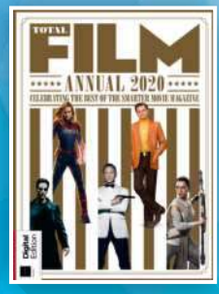

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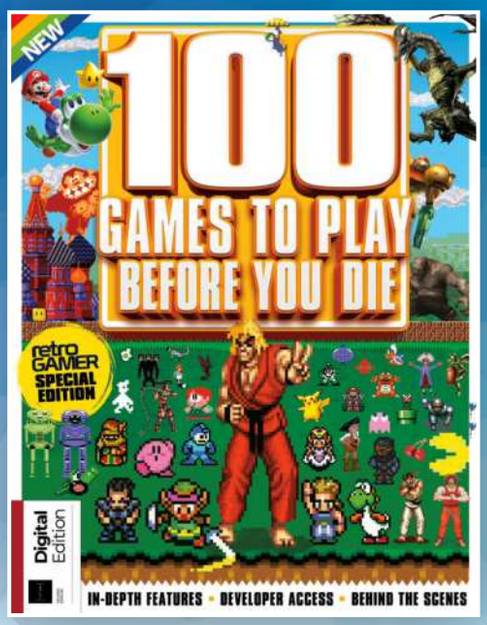

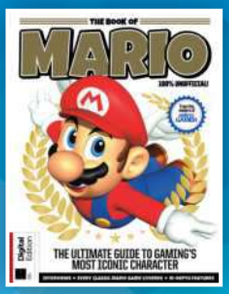

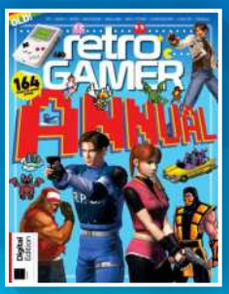

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